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Adventure

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A Jungle Novelette
by Arthur O. Friel

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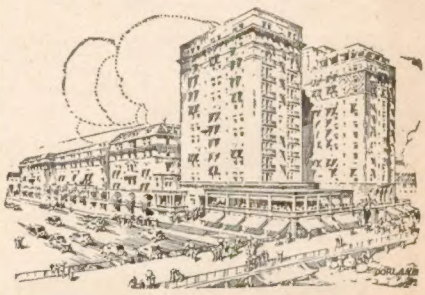

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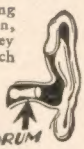

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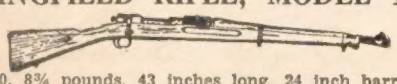

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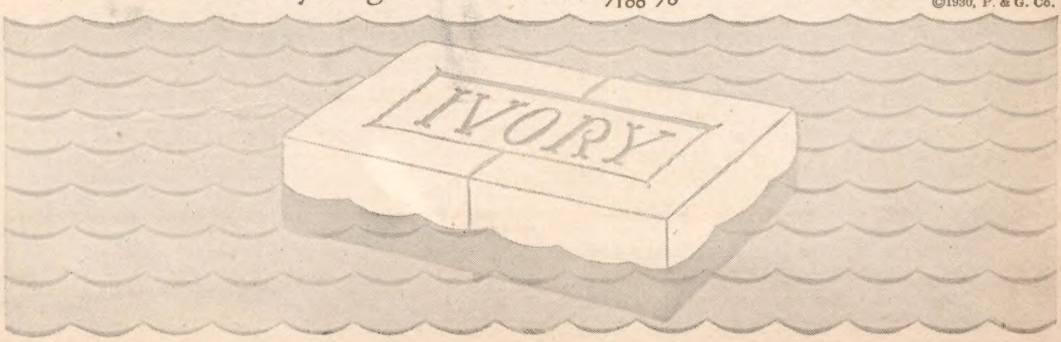

Adventure

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Cover Design by Remington Schuyler *Headings by Neil O'Keeffe*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; B. C. Dunklin, Secretary; Fred Lewis, Treasurer; A. A. Proctor, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents, in Canada Thirty Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 75 cents. Trade Mark Registered; Copyright, 1931, by The Butterick Publishing Company in the United States and Great Britain.

BLACK FLAG

By

TALBOT MUNDY

MENDOZA lolled against the taffrail. His felucca, with the sails all brailed up, lay like a killer whale with her nose to the flank of the fine bark *Grace of God*. He was watching his men carry the loot over the bow, but there was some of it coming in the bark's boats. He watched the boats, too; even pirates have a way of cheating one another; the rule of one share all and two for the captain, led to a lot of wasteful fighting unless the captain kept his eyes skinned.

Mendoza had eyes like a shark's—unemotional, almost sleepless, cruel. His craving to be cruel was increased by the pain of an abscessed tooth that had swollen the jaw under his curled black beard. His hand went to his face now and then as he spat and glanced at human bodies on the calm sea being torn by the sharks that had come swarming when the first went overboard.

"No prisoners!"

Each man, under pirate law, had the right to do with his own captive exactly as he pleased, and except in the case of women, who were rare but valuable loot, that frequently led to disaster. At the time of "taking" a ship it was easy to make men kill and get it over with; afterward, in cold blood, not so easy. Spared men usually were recruited after a period of bullying and horseplay, and such recruits seldom had a genuine taste for the business. Piracy seldom became their religion; they remained amateurs. Many a pirate captain's corpse had hung in chains because he let his crew become diluted with men who were sailors at heart and not pirates at all except by force of necessity.

of the Spanish Main

Nevertheless, two prisoners had been taken from the *Grace of God*—her captain and his sixty year old cabin boy. The latter, as devoted as a dog, had got in his master's way attempting to protect him as he fought with his back to the bark's wheel. Both were stunned from behind and had been thrown on board the pirate vessel, where they recovered consciousness.

Because his tooth ached, and he had been disobeyed, Mendoza was in an even more savage mood than usual. He had ordered the bark's captain blown from the midship swivel gun, and the cabin boy hanged to the masthead feet first, to be swung there until he died. But there was no hurry—lots of loot yet to be brought aboard. It amused Mendoza that the prisoners should stand there with the sun in their faces, one lashed to the cannon mouth, one to the mainmast, and await their end. The captured bark was much too unhandy and big for a pirate's purposes; it might add to her captain's anguish to be forced to watch her being burned.

Besides, he was not sure that he would not first flog the man for keeping such a stiff chin. Mild faced, portly—almost corpulent—Captain Alexander, with his reddish hair and straight lipped smile, was the sort that Mendoza despised and hated. Obviously a moralist. Morals and Mendoza did not mix. But with that ache in his jaw he hated every one, and above all, laughter angered him. His boatswain climbed out of a boat and dropped a heap of plunder on the deck, then stood shaking with laughter at the

cabin boy lashed to the mast. Mendoza drew one of his pistols with the genial intention of blowing the prisoner's brains out so as to spoil the boatswain's entertainment.

"Like a toad!" roared the boatswain in Spanish. "No teeth!" He set his thumbs in Willie Tim's mouth and forced the toothless gums apart. "Can't bite!"

"Fetch him aft," said Mendoza, whose macabre moods were now and then cross-lit by curiosity.

So Willie walked aft at the point of a cutlass and was cross-examined. Yes, he once had teeth. The captain had pulled them a few at a time. No, not for punishment. Because they ached. If a man's tooth ached the captain always pulled it; he was a good chirurgeon; he could bleed or drench a man and make him fit for work. Because of that men called him Tooth behind his back, although his name was Alexander.

"Tooth, tooth!" he would say. "Who can bite on biscuit with a tooth in his head like a hot nail?"

Yes, it did take half the watch to hold a man sometimes; but it was all right afterward; a pulled tooth soon quits aching.

"Tooth, eh? Fetch him," said Mendoza, and he sat down on the trunnion of the starboard poop gun. No one would have dared to hold Mendoza, any more than he would have dared to let men try to. He had his reputation to consider. He gave orders to the boatswain and there was a pause while Captain Alexander's chest of medicines and instruments was brought, and the two men eyed each other. Then:

"I ache me," said Mendoza. "Out! *Car-r-ramba de diabolo!* Pull it out!"

Captain Alexander answered quietly because he could not trust himself if he gave emotion rein. He was used to day-long silences and sudden anger that he afterward regretted.

"I am pleased that it aches. I know how such teeth rot the very guts of you at last."

A promise being small coin, Mendoza bargained, as his way was, gracelessly—

"You may live till you rot, if you pull it."

"You and your swine," said Alexander, "have butchered my mate, two 'prentices, and three and thirty men. I have only this boy left to me. I want him."

Mendoza grinned sourly at that speech and his boatswain made ready to kill the sixty year old Willie as a cook splits fish. But there was creeping fire in Mendoza's upper jaw, and talk about it had increased the agony, besides suggesting how agreeable relief would be.

"Have him," he answered. "Pull it!"

MEN PAUSED even from the looting. It was no news that Mendoza had the heart of a shark, but it was breathtaking to watch him, with the blood running down on his black beard and his long fingers gripping his pistols. The tooth broke. But the fragments came out at last.

"Amen," said Willie Tims. He always said that when the captain finished something, whether it was sights or Sunday sermon.

"Rum!" Mendoza ordered; and he studied his crew while he drank it and spat.

There were some of them hurt. A pirate's men are just as valuable to him as the choir is to the parson; but good pirates are harder to find than choir boys, and the trade is much more difficult to learn.

"Chirurgeon them!" he ordered, being not pedantic in his use of English.

Captain Alexander, master-mariner of Boston, Lincolnshire, thus became pirate-surgeon in the lawless port of Panama. From that day forward no one called him anything but Amen Tooth, because Willie Tims always said amen to whatever his master said or did. Willie Tims, being willing to please, was not ill treated beyond endurance even when the pirates were in a mood for entertainment; there was a suspicion in the back of their minds that Mendoza might, perhaps, have been in earnest when he granted Willie leave to live, and it was deadly dangerous to break Mendoza's

word for him. He could do that himself, and in that respect he tolerated no officious interference.

Amen Tooth discovered there were only two things that Mendoza feared. One of those was not Charlotta, his mulatto woman. It was her black arts. Charlotta herself could be disciplined, but yellow fever was nothing tangible that a gentleman could cajole, bribe or thrash. Yellow fever had wiped out scores of estimable pirates. It might carry off Charlotta. There was no way of protecting her against it as one could, for instance, from the rival pirate captains who desired her; or as one protected her against her own peculiarly Cuban disposition by the use of fists or whip. So he dreaded yellow fever, too.

Charlotta's hold on Mendoza was even stronger than his own hold on his crew. They had to protect and obey him because he knew how to navigate and they did not. Besides, Mendoza was a genius who seemed to know by instinct when to put to sea in order to waylay merchantmen. But he was superstitious. He could not get along without Charlotta's witchcraft. She had a way of foretelling the future in trances, and with packs of playing cards, and with dust and the smoke of burning feathers.

So he warned Amen Tooth he would flay him alive if the least harm happened to Charlotta. Tooth, to all intents and purposes, became Charlotta's slave. He had to follow her through the fly ridden lanes of Panama that stank of the endemic pestilence. She craved the admiration of Mendoza's rivals, loved to display the plundered jewelry she wore and, above all, enjoyed the dignity of being slaved for by an ex-sea captain, on whom she heaped indignities.

When he remonstrated, she struck him.

"I go where I please! And you come when I say!"

"The yellow jack will get you," Amen Tooth warned.

"Ants shall get you!" she retorted. "I will have you pegged out on an anthill to be eaten alive if you show me impudence!"

She was known to have persuaded Mendoza to do that to several people. Between the devil and the deep sea of Mendoza's and Charlotta's threats, Tooth resorted to strategy.

"If I should lie," he said to Willie Tims one night in the gloom of the thatched shed they were allowed to occupy, "the Lord forgive it. I believe we two should not have been allowed to live unless it were to wreak vengeance."

"Amen, master. Take a knife and kill him. I can kill her."

"Kill two hornets? There is a swarm needs smoking! Bide the right time."

"Amen."

So he lied to Mendoza. He invented a plot by rival pirate captains to decoy Charlotta and throw dice for her. Mendoza had never courted popularity, so he believed the story and pulled out of Panama, after setting fire to half the waterfront; and the shotted salute, with which he signaled "fare ye well", cut down the mainmast of the sloop belonging to Charles Dupont, the halfbreed from Mauritius. Vasco Gomez came out with his felucca in pursuit, but one at a time was not the profitable way to fight Mendoza. The other pirate ships were careening or being repaired. Gomez fired a shot or two and turned back.

MENDOZA chose himself an island protected by reefs with tortuous channels between, that afforded safe sanctuary. It was a clean, green island like a jewel in a foam-white setting. There he set his men and their women and some slaves to building a stockaded village. And since he had a professional navigator on his hands, whom conscience, etiquette and ordinary prudence made it almost sinful not to kill, he suppressed his premonitions by putting Amen Tooth and Willie Tims to work in a longboat, sounding and secretly marking the dangerous channels. Even a halfwit learns a trade or two at sea. Between spells of rowing Willie Tims made a lug sail out of stolen scraps of canvas. But they were watched and

escape was impossible. Charlotta watched incessantly. She had learned to value Amen Tooth's services, and she enjoyed more than ever inflicting gross indignities on a man who had once been despot on his own poop.

But there was rum. The pirate law forbidding any man to get too drunk for duty did not bind Charlotta, who could do as she pleased in that respect. She got so drunk that she forgot her manners. Mendoza smote her one night on her impudent, sensuous mouth with a fist that had hell in its knuckles. Next night, by the light of the whale oil lanterns in the long, low bunkhouse she was held, kicking and screaming, while surgeon Amen Tooth removed the broken stumps of all her front teeth.

"And I think I see the way home, Willie."

"Amen."

"And then vengeance."

"Amen."

Charlotta, desperate about her beauty, first made magic. She was mocked by jealous women when the magic failed her. Mendoza, shark eyed sober in his cups, sneered at the gap where her milk-white teeth had been. She could see her authority dwindling. She began to make friends with the man she despised. He told her tales of false teeth that renew youth. They seemed incredible until he produced two from his own mouth.

"If you had teeth like those, Charlotta, you could grin and bite, and nobody would know the difference. You'd look pretty again for Mendoza."

"You make them?"

"I can't. But I know who can. If you help me escape, I could bring them."

But she was used to pirates' promises, and she knew what value Tooth set on his servant, so she demanded Willie Tims as hostage:

"You leave him here and bring him teeth too. Then I know you come back."

Tooth refused.

"Both or neither. If you want new teeth, help both of us escape."

There were days of heart sickening argument and delay after that, but at last she compromised.

"I will make you so you dare not lie to me."

"Witchcraft?"

"Magic."

Amen Tooth remembered he was Captain Alexander. He had always preached a Sunday sermon from the poop when wind and sea permitted. Witchcraft, magic and the devil were the same thing. However, he had to submit to a dark ordeal devised to bind his will and make him faithful. There was the blood of a goat, and the skull of a man who had died of torture. There was a torn page from a prayer book taken from the bedroom of a virgin on her bridal night. And there were exactly thirteen drops of red blood taken from his own left wrist and mixed, with incantations, with exactly thirteen drops of hers. There was also a voice that seemed to come from nowhere, emitting strange words in an unknown tongue. It was genuine *juju* magic, she said, and he prayed about it afterward, with half-wit Willie adding amen.

Next evening he made a clay cast of Charlotta's gums, which he copied afterward in lead from melted bullets, to make permanent and convincing. She had preserved her broken teeth for superstitious reasons; those were pieced together and also copied carefully in lead.

"I know a man in Lincoln. It was he who taught me how to pull teeth. He will copy these and your new ones shall come to you in a merchant ship. Its captain shall be told of buried treasure. He shall be given the bearings of this island. He shall be told that if he flies three red flags at the fore, one above the other, a ship will put forth with the woman on board to whom the teeth belong. He shall be told that the woman will stay on his ship. She will pay for her teeth by pilotage to where the buried treasure lies."

Charlotta nodded.

"That will please Mendoza twice. I shall be beautiful again. And the ship will be easy pillage. Send a rich ship. I will prophesy its coming and Mendoza

will know that my magic is good."

"Depend on me."

But hope almost died stillborn. Mendoza became suspicious. He declared that his soul would sicken in him if he kept stale promises too long.

"*Carr-r-ramba!* It is time to send you two to hell!"

Charlotta saved that hour by inspiring a fight between boatswain and cook, good cutthroats whom Mendoza valued. He had to spare Tooth and Willie to attend to knife wounds. When the wounds were nearly healed Charlotta devised a new expedient. She went into a trance and swore she saw a fat, slow merchant ship becalmed about a hundred miles away. She also intimated that Mendoza's rivals, Gomez and Dupont, were weighing anchor to give chase on the strength of a rumor. And it was Mendoza's most exquisite passion to gloat over the disgust of rivals who were too late to share a ship's pillage.

"Man ship and warp her out! The last man aboard gets no share of the loot!"

Mendoza was always a man of his word in such particulars, so there was hurry and confusion. It was midnight, and the marks invisible. Instead of being taken along as surgeon, Amen Tooth was sent in the longboat with Willie Tims to show a flare at the turn of the channel; and because of darkness it was not noticed that they set the lug sail. They were only missed when there was no flare at the corner of the reef and Mendoza saved his ship by letting go anchors and sweeping her clear. Then it was too late to pursue.

SO AMEN TOOTH reached Rio, where a homeward bound captain of a barkentine took pity on him and provided passage, entering his story briefly in the log, but adding:

"So said he, and so said Tims his servant, whether credibly or not. He appears to believe that Lord Ambleby will provide him a new ship, but that is his Lordship's business and remains to be seen. So ends this day."

He was a pious Scotsman out of Aberdeen, who might have refused the passage home if he knew about the false teeth and a bargain with a pirate's mulatto witch. Captain Alexander was probably silent on that score; there was no mention of it in the Scotsman's log.

Captains who have lost their ships are irritable people, often at their wits' end for a livelihood. It comes expensive to be sympathetic or too inquisitive. Gossip is safer. So in his home port, Boston, Lincolnshire, Captain Alexander was left very much on his own resources. Willie Tims got drunk at the Green Man, but nobody believed what Willie Tims mumbled through his toothless gums. However, gossip leaked out through the servants' hall at Grey Grange, where Lord Ambleby's butler often overheard talk while he drew the corks of claret bottles and judiciously warmed the wine behind a screen that concealed the pantry passage. It was common knowledge that Lord Ambleby had made a fortune out of the good bark *Grace of God*. The butler quoted him:

"It is true you have made money for me from time to time. But now you have lost the ship and that costs a fortune. It is an unheard of thing to give a captain who has lost a good ship the command of another one. People would laugh."

"Who would laugh—" or so the butler said that Alexander answered—"if it were known that the *Grace of God*, on many an occasion, delivered cannons to the French, that had been cast and finished in your Lordship's foundry, of iron from your Lordship's mines?"

Lord Ambleby blustered, in the way of weak willed men who must choose between bad alternatives.

"God's vengeance! I must keep my men employed. The king's ships rot at moorings, and the Admiralty buys no cannon."

"It is of vengeance that I speak, and you have also a duty to me. Am I to hold my tongue about your Lordship's dealings? The king's enemies have money; but your Lordship's enemies have

tongues, and is there not a law against high treason?"

There began to be rumors of buried treasure when Lord Ambleby purchased a French prize of war, a neat, swift bark of seven hundred tons, and recommissioned her with Captain Alexander in command. But there was amazement when it was learned that King George, acting on his minister's advice at the request of Lord Ambleby, had granted letters of marque to Captain Alexander, authorizing him to commit such acts of war against the king's enemies as might be necessary. There was nothing new about letters of marque, but it was a new idea to grant them to a mild man addicted to mothering crews and preaching to them from his poop on Sunday afternoons. Send out a sheep to prey on wolves? Lord Ambleby had prophesied rightly; there was laughter.

And then mystery. Powder was put aboard and guns were mounted. Shot of all three sizes almost took the place of ballast; there was no cargo other than provisions, and that, of course, revived the rumors about buried treasure, to be dug and perhaps fought for. The bark was re-rigged to make her handier; stout oak bulwarks were erected, and almost everything was altered except the bark's name and the female figurehead. It was considered an almost awe inspiring coincidence that the name was *Grâce de Dieu;* but that was presently forgotten.

It was reckoned proof of Captain Alexander's madness that he caused the artist, who was painting Lord Ambleby's portrait, to insert very large teeth in the mouth of the figurehead, and so to darken the face that it resembled that of a grinning negress rather than the patron saint of the French port whence the ship originally came.

BUT THAT, too, was forgotten when the crew was signed on. Such a godless gang of rogues was a disgrace to the port of Boston. There was no one who could navigate in the event that Alexander should fall sick or be disabled. In place of mate there was a boatswain who had been flogged out of the king's navy for easing sheets without orders. For boatswain, there was a man who had served two terms in prison for smuggling. The carpenter was also a jailbird. Half of the crew were deserters from the king's ships, who had changed their names for the sake of less exasperating misery ashore; of the remainder, two or three were soldiers and the rest such unsavory rogues that not even a press gang would have seized them for enlistment in the navy.

"Will he preach them to obedience? How long before they mutiny? Will he draw their teeth and turn them into toads like Willie Tims?"

But that was his affair. In a calm, in a fog, about a hundred leagues to the westward of Finisterre, the crew did mutiny and ordered him to turn back homeward. But he took out the letters of marque from the box in his cabin and burned them in their presence.

"Now you are pirates. If you return home they will hang you. And unless you obey me, who will navigate you?"

"Amen," chanted Willie Tims.

That was not good sea law, but it was good psychology. They were ignorant men. They had tasted jail and cat-o'-nine-tails, poverty, hunger, ignominy. Piracy could hardly be worse. Hope of sudden fortune smiled on them as the sun did through the melting mist. They discovered a man who could write and after long debate brought back a scrawled agreement laying down conditions. Alexander tossed that overboard.

"This is my ship. It is I who make conditions."

"Amen," agreed Willie Tims.

"Pirates are not coins that have their value on their faces. Prove your worth," said Alexander. "He who stands to his gun without flinching shall have his deserts. I will sign what is proper, after I have laid you alongside such a ship as will test your mettle."

"Amen."

"And I will pistol the man who disobeys me."

"Amen," chanted toothless Willie Tims.

"Whoever calls me Alexander in my hearing, him will I also pistol. I am Amen Tooth from this day forward."

Nobody knows why one man can impose his will on many, although how it is done is the whole lesson of history. The crew went forward. Mutiny had vanished like the mist on the track of the wind. Hope of plunder, gun drill and the weather kept them too busy to do much thinking. The grub was good, and Alexander remembered to add the last, convincing touch.

"Cut a black flag out of that tarpaulin, Willie. Bend and hoist it at the maintop. It will stiffen their fear of hanging and their hope of fortune."

"Amen."

But there was no black flag aloft when the *Grâce de Dieu* hove to in sight of Panama, where French Dupont and Dago Gomez lay at anchor, famished for lack of mischief and afraid to send their crews ashore because of yellow fever raging. They gave chase. Amen Tooth fled, towing a sail behind him because the pirates' hulls were foul with weed and the *Grâce de Dieu* was faster. He desired those rivals of Mendoza both in full view, but out of cannon range, when he sighted Mendoza's island. And so it happened. From the fore he broke out three red signal flags. Mendoza, no doubt thoughtful of Charlotta's prophecy, weighed anchor in a hurry to forestall his rivals.

FROM his poop, where he carefully conned bearings and recalled to mind the secret channel marks that he and Willie had so tediously placed, Amen Tooth spoke to his crew.

"I have stove all water butts save one. So if you wish to drink tomorrow, you will stand to your guns this day and serve them smartly. Two ships are to windward and can bear down, so we can't run. It is better to fight one than two, so I will put the reefs to windward of us. Stand by sheets and braces."

But he continued to tow the sail. Dupont and Gomez crowded after him, to pounce if he should hit the reef, or follow through if he should chance to know the channel. So he kept all canvas set, to seem in great haste; but he towed that sail so that the pirates might gain on him little by little, racing to lay alongside before Mendoza could claim the pickings. Pirate law was first come, first served.

"Bosun, you are to cut down any man who flinches."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Yon ship is Mendoza's. It is his habit to flay prisoners alive. So you shall fight this day or die like skinned eels! Serve rum for all hands!"

The *Grâce de Dieu*, her toothed figurehead grinning lewdly, boiled through surf between the reefs into the crescent shaped bay; and Mendoza came beating to windward on a course that should bring him astern of his intended victim and cut her out under his rivals' guns. That was a daring maneuver; Gomez and Dupont were already inside the reef and they had the advantage of the wind. Perhaps Mendoza counted on their fear of him to make them turn tail. But Amen Tooth upset all calculations:

"Stand to your guns! Make ready!"

Great square gun ports opened suddenly along each bulwark and the muzzles of the guns protruded as the *Grâce de Dieu* changed helm and headed straight toward Mendoza's ship. They were so close that the wind was stolen from Mendoza's sails. The *Grâce de Dieu's* commander bellowed through a trumpet at the pirate:

"Can you see your woman's new teeth? Come and take them! Fire a broadside, Bosun!"

Five black cannon belched their shot into the pirate's bulwarks and were drawn in to be reloaded. Mendoza's mainmast crashed in the billowing smoke as his ship fell away on the wind, and in another moment Gomez and Dupont were crowding down at less than pistol range. They and Mendoza were hull to hull until they passed him, one on either side, exchanging threats but saving can-

non shot for Amen Tooth. Mendoza shot two men for unhandiness as he got his ship before the wind, manned sweeps and gave chase.

"Ready about! Stand by!" roared Tooth.

No elegant maneuver—not done handily, with two-thirds of the crew either sponging and loading the starboard guns or at their stations ready to serve the portside battery. Amen Tooth lost a topmast just as all three pirates came abreast of him, two to port and one to starboard; but he was in time to send his second broadside into the three pirate ships. They were huddled together, the two on the port side rubbing hulls, their captains cursing one another. Then Tooth fell away again before the wind—landlocked—no room now to work around to windward, all three pirates after him, Mendoza lagging in the rear. Emerald-green, sunlit shoals ahead. The beach to starboard. On the port coamers bursting on the coral. It was stark luck that a shot from Gomez' bow gun split the mainmast of the *Grâce de Dieu;* nothing less than that disaster could have possibly saved the bark from going aground or striking on the reef.

With every sheet let go the *Grâce* swung to her tangled mainmast and came head to wind again. Gomez and Dupont were closing in on either side, intent on grappling, their crews too busy with the downhauls to fire more than a shot or two. They were much too eager to outrace Mendoza. As they closed in they exposed their flanks at point blank range.

"Both broadsides!"

The ships reeled as if a hurricane had struck them. Round shot tore into their hulls. They split and splintered. Gaps yawned above the waterline. One grapnel came aboard, but the boatswain's cutlass severed the line made fast to it. And then Mendoza, downwind, head on, even angrier with Gomez and Dupont than with the grin of the white toothed figurehead that mocked him and his woman.

"I see you, Amen Tooth! By God and all his devils, I will make you die a new way!"

But Tooth, with his mainmast overside, looked like an easy victim. Mendoza was minded first to deal with Gomez and Dupont. Their crews had manned their long sweeps; they were struggling back upwind to grapple the stern of the *Grâce de Dieu.* Mendoza changed his helm to bring bow guns to bear on both of them, raking them fore and aft with round shot and a hail of bullets. Charlotta was on the poop beside him—toothless—furious. She screamed obscenities at Amen Tooth. Hope of beauty gone, and savagery turned to frenzy by the grinning white teeth of the black faced figurehead, she snatched and fired Mendoza's pistol, missed, then wrenched the wheel from the helmsman and put the helm hard up to crash the *Grâce.* But there had been time to reload both batteries. Dupont was sinking as he drifted downwind. Before Mendoza realized it, Gomez gained the bark's lee and his men came scrambling up her bulwarks. And again both broadsides of the *Grâce de Dieu* belched shot at point blank range that tore the hulls of Gomez and Mendoza—ripped their decks asunder—split them into wrecks that only floated because the sea takes time to pour through gaping seams.

Then even Mendoza hesitated mid-oath. As he gathered himself to leap at the side of the *Grâce de Dieu* a pistol bullet, aimed by Willie Tims, who crouched behind the taffrail, missed him by a foot. It struck Charlotta. As she opened her toothless gums to curse again the maker of the long toothed jest, the bullet met the curse. It blew a hole through the back of her head, and as she fell dead at Mendoza's feet he knew himself bereft of something more than a mere wench. Without her witchcraft, luck was gone too. And without luck, confidence.

Gomez' men had already gained the bulwark and were leaping down on the deck of the *Grâce de Dieu* before Mendoza's anger rallied him and with a brimstone oath he led his own crew from a sinking ship to drive his rivals overside and claim his pirate-lawful prey.

For an hour a battle raged three-sided

on the deck—no quarter asked or given. Some of Amen Tooth's men had to man the poop and shoot at survivors from Dupont's ship who were swimming from their sunken wreck and sought to add their number to the ranks of Gomez. So Amen Tooth had only two-thirds of his dock rat crew to fight—pirates who must win or die because their battered ships were useless.

But they say he fought like ten men. Willie Tims, armed with a pike, protected him until the fight died of exhaustion and survivors gaped at one another, dry throated, dumb, their weapons drooping on the blood smeared deck. Then pirates began dropping one by one into the sea to take their chance of swimming. But Mendoza and Gomez lingered, glaring at each other, pistols empty and no strength remaining to employ their swords.

"Hell have us all!" Mendoza swore then. "Some one go fire the powder barrels!"

Willie Tims passed pistols to his master, stooped, offered his own shoulders on which to rest them while the captain aimed. But Amen Tooth, his boatswain-mate and his boatswain dead beside him, and with seventeen men dead or dying on the deck, saw fit to have his vengeance in his own way.

"Surround them, you there—I will pistol the man who flinches. Give them room, then put the 'cat' to them until they fight!"

So some one found the boatswain's cat-o'-nine-tails that he had tucked into his belt for use in hastening the gun crews at the sponging and reloading—nine knots to a lash, nine lashes. One blow across Gomez' shoulders and he made a virtue of necessity. One lash across Mendoza's and Mendoza met him midway. So they slew each other, each too drooping, tired, to guard against the other's thrust. Mendoza spoke before he died:

"You are a coward, Amen Tooth. You let another kill me. I would have killed you with my own hands, slowly!"

"But you did not." And then presently, "Is he dead yet? Launch both boats. We are too few now to work the ship home. Fire the powder barrels. She shall not fall into pirate's hands. Water the boats and patch wounds on the island." Then he turned to Willie Tims. "We will try to make Rio again."

"Amen, master."

"And so home, if it may be."

"Amen."

COME ON, ZOUAVES!

A Story of the French Colonials

By GEORGES SURDEZ

THE VERY traits that made Captain Tarfer a splendid leader of professional soldiers would probably work against his popularity among conscripted men. Tarfer was an officer best suited for the frontiers, not for a garrison city. Therefore his transfer from the Foreign Legion's training battalion at Sidi bel Abbès to the Regiment of Zouaves at Oran startled his friends. They believed it would mean the end of his career.

Legionnaires—hardened men, volunteers, mercenaries—admired in Tarfer a fantastic, fearless, swashbuckling demigod, their champion against the outside world; the bane of the police, of greedy tradesmen, of the people who preyed on their meager pay while scorning them. They knew that he had remained one of them at heart, despite the triple looping of gold braid on his sleeves. Only the World War and a phenomenal run of luck, which had left him ranking survivor repeatedly, had brought him to a commission.

Tarfer was self-taught, proud of his achievements, and since he had enlisted in the Legion at the age of nineteen, his universe had been composed of Legionnaires, men whom he deemed superior to all others, men to be admired, forgiven and even loved for their superb faults as much as their sublime qualities.

He was brave—no man holds a commission in the Foreign Regiments for long

unless he possesses a high brand of courage—and to have followed him into action was a diploma of distinction preferred to official medals and bronze crosses. Tarfer was picturesque under fire, insulted his foes in Homeric style. Yet he remained cunning, and sparing of the lives entrusted to him.

He had been wounded more than a dozen times—during the World War and in Morocco. He was one of the handful of men awarded the Order of Sherifian Merit, granted only to those wounded four times in the service of the Protectorate—in Syria and even in the Tonkin, where for many years the greater danger had been from disease rather than fire.

Judged by outside standards, he was not a model officer. Erratic, quick tempered, at times unjust, he was moreover admitted to be a trifle mad from the effects of a severe head wound. But, in the eyes of the Legionnaires, he could do no wrong.

Officers aroused bitterness and near mutiny with an unguarded word or gesture. Actions and speeches that would have brought any other captain before a medical examining board were accepted in Tarfer's case, laughed at, dismissed. When he punished his horse, for throwing him out of the saddle on parade, with confinement to quarters, his men smiled. When he punched a civilian in the nose for speaking lightly of the army in general and the Legion in particular, his superiors managed to hush the incident.

At one time he led his company out of Sidi bel Abbès, in the full heat of an Algerian summer afternoon, equipped as for the Western Front, with steel helmets, gas masks and greatcoats. Under a broiling sun, the Legionnaires marched, dug trenches, charged imaginary enemies through fancied barrages, staggering, their breathing hampered by the thick hoods of the masks. They sweated and they swore, seemed ready to drop as much from sheer disgust as from fatigue, but they stuck to the end and marched back to barracks behind Tarfer, grinning.

"The damned nut," they said. "Would any one else think that one up? Gas masks in North Africa—"

They submitted to his whims, his scoldings, his odd experiments, with endless patience and unwearying good humor. And they were the same men who courted prison rather than alter a single trifling item of their equipment, the men who littered the roadside with the sun helmets issued them by official order.

Would the Zouaves prove as forbearing? That was unlikely. The company to which Tarfer was assigned was notoriously unmilitary in spirit. The men serving in its ranks were conscripted youths, from twenty to twenty-two years old, interested only in concluding their compulsory eighteen months of service with the least effort.

Into that company had been placed the local boys, the sons of wealthy Oranese families kept near the parental roof by political influence. The reaction against militarism following the war was growing stronger in the civilian population. Tarfer was the essence of all that was professional soldier, the personification of unreasoning devotion to the flag. No good could come from the contact.

Tarfer was disgruntled when he received official notice of the shift. Had he been informed that he was to be shot at dawn, he could not have been more startled, more perturbed. He doubled to the barracks, where he found his men in the first stages of riot, as he had expected. They sensed the injustice done their leader. Tarfer quieted them with a few words, spoke loftily of absolute, unquestioning obedience. Then he sped across the yard, ascended the stairs to the colonel's office four at a time.

"What's this, Colonel? I'm sent to the Zouaves? Me—Tarfer—in the Zouaves? What are they trying to do, drive me mad?"

Colonel Chamars held up his hand to stop the flow of protests. For a moment he looked at Tarfer in silence. The captain was thirty-four, a tall, well knit, handsome man, clean shaved according to prevailing style. Of his many wounds,

only one showed, the white depression above his left eye under which, it was claimed, rested a silver plate.

"I've made inquiries, Pierre. Division headquarters informs me that the transfer sticks." Chamars shrugged. "That is—until I pull strings in Paris."

"I didn't ask for a transfer—"

"Transferred by order. But I'll have you back here inside of six months, see if I don't. You know I wouldn't let you go forever, Pierre, not I—"

"Will I have to wear their damned uniform?"

"I can't see how you'd avoid it—anyway, it's only changing the *képi* and the collar badges for a time." Colonel Chamars lighted a cigaret from the tip of another, went on in a gentle voice, "As for me, Pierre, I know exactly what you have been doing. You are no more cracked than I am. You cultivate a personality—for the Legion. Some one is trying to 'get' you. If I were in your place, I'd fool him. I'd change my tactics, play safe. You can do it easily enough if you'll remember that your men are young conscripts, not as tough as Legionnaires."

Tarfer was seldom downcast for long.

"That's an idéa, Colonel. Then you'll ask me to come back to the old regiment, eh?"

"Legionnaire's word, Pierre," the colonel promised.

Both were discreet, did not mention the unofficial reason for the transfer, although it was gossiped in the North African forces that the new general of division, Roseny, was shifting Tarfer to avenge an old offense. Roseny had every reason to believe that Tarfer, reputed as erratic and harsh in the Legion, would prove impossible in the Zouaves and give cause for being pensioned before the age limit.

This was not a noble plan. When Louis of Orleans became Louis XII, he made a point of informing those about him that the offenses against the Duke of Orleans were not the concern of the King of France. Roseny was not of the same courtly, forgiving stock. Or perhaps, the passing of centuries and the altering of knightly standards explained why General of Division Roseny, better known as "Veal Loaf" for his mottled, pinkish complexion, had never forgotten or forgiven words spoken to Staff Major Roseny.

Traced to its origin, the clash had been unimportant. The yarns were true only in so much as Tarfer had, as always, possessed enough moral courage to voice what many others might have been satisfied to think.

ON A DAMP, chilly morning of the spring of 1917, Tarfer, already a captain, had been awaiting the signal that would send him and two hundred Legionnaires over the top to face German machine guns behind barbed wires under a downpour of assorted Krupp hardware. Within a few seconds, these men knew, they would expose their frail flesh to mangling projectiles, their souls to the torture of controlled emotions.

At that critical moment, Staff Major Roseny had come up to the starting trench, in which he was to remain to observe details of the attack. Roseny had led a battalion of infantry on the Front for two years. He was a brave man and his assignment to the staff was justified, as he proved later by his rapid progress. But he was brutal of manner, tactless of speech, showed a callousness that rankled. Moreover, his uniform was too new, too blue, his ribbons too fresh, his stick and gloves an affectation.

The Legionnaires stared at him, at first with curiosity, with a lurking envy for this beautifully rigged out chap who would be fairly safe. Then they suddenly felt more miserable, forlorn, muddier in their baggy garments.

"Perishable—keep away from fire—" some one said.

Roseny frowned, sought for the speaker. Then he nodded to Tarfer, peered through a loophole at the company's first objective, an area of tumbled masonry that had been a village. No one ever could

recall his exact words, but all agreed that he stated that the job was easy, not dangerous.

Tarfer overheard him. He stepped back into the trench from the steps dug by sappers, invited Roseny to take his place.

"In that case, the honor is yours, *mon Commandant*—"

"I'm here as an observer."

"Then observe—in silence. Isn't it enough to ask men to get themselves slaughtered without taking them for damned fools in the bargain? That job is dangerous, they know it, and they don't need to be kidded—"

"Get back to your post, Captain!"

"As long as you've deflated, *mon Commandant*, I will—"

"Your name?" Roseny rasped.

"Tarfer—Pierre-Prosper Tarfer—private to captain in the Legion; three wounds; thirteen citations; furthermore, a guy who's not afraid of you or anything like you—" Tarfer stiffened as the expected signal was given. "All right, lads— grenadiers ahead—come on!"

Roseny made a report, but Tarfer was never punished.

Even a ruthless military organization stressing the importance of rigid discipline could not press charges against a man severely wounded, a man who had earned a fourteenth citation, a man who was not expected to survive. For despite Roseny's opinion, the Legionnaire's task had been serious.

Prussian infantrymen sheltered in the cellars of the ruined village emerged to meet the attacking waves of French troops. In the central place, Tarfer was downed by a machine gun bullet. On the way to the dressing station, an eighty-eight shell killed one of the stretcher bearers, wounded the other and fractured Tarfer's skull.

Tarfer was a vigorous man. He did not die, but recovered in time to get into the drives of the following summer, sound as ever except for a new scar on his head. He contrived to glean three more citations and to be wounded again in October, 1918. Then he went back to the Legion in North Africa.

As Roseny was a metropolitan army man, serving in France, while the Legion serves in the colonies, the two had not met again. Then Roseny had been appointed to command the Oran Division, of which the First Foreign Regiment of Infantry forms a part. It was never ascertained whether Roseny knew of Tarfer's presence at Sidi bel Abbès or if he had simply recognized the name on the list of officers. In any case, he engineered Tarfer's transfer.

Roseny's plan was simple. Since the war, the Zouaves had degenerated from a shock unit to ordinary regiments. Their officers were almost all school taught, so Tarfer's known conceit, his practical knowledge, would irritate them. And a man used to handling Legionnaires would prove too harsh for conscripts. At that time, a single unfavorable comment in the press was often sufficient to send an officer into premature retirement. Tarfer, the crude Tarfer, who had been a mule driver in his 'teens before joining the Legion, would be unable to dodge trouble.

TARFER decided to take the offensive. Upon arriving at Oran, he immediately reported at the Zouave's barracks, dropping in like a bolt out of the blue. He did not find any officers there, and inspected the company rapidly assembled by the noncoms. The men were youngsters, but fairly robust. On the whole, they appeared a good lot of soldiers, and their worth depended on leadership. He sent orderlies after the officers, who were located and warned that the new captain had shown up and seemed displeased. Tarfer received the lieutenant and sub-lieutenant in the company's office.

"Glad to meet you, Langre—and you too, Biot! I decided not to wait for formal introduction by the colonel. I don't know how matters have been run by my predecessor. I do not believe it necessary to tell you what your duties are. How are the sergeants?"

"Excellent, Captain," Lieutenant Langre answered. He was perhaps twenty-five, a fine, alert type.

"They must be! But they do not hold commissions, and it is usual to have an officer present at drill. Which of you was presumably on duty?"

"I, Captain." Sub-lieutenant Biot stepped forward. Very young, fresh from school, evidently very sensitive, Tarfer judged.

"Well?"

"The routine is familiar to the sergeants, Captain. I received an invitation to see an exposition of paintings at the Continental Hotel and I believed—you understand—"

"Outside interests are commendable for young officers." Tarfer nodded. His blue eyes glistened ironically, "But in the future, try to arrange your schedule better. Now, in every company there exists a bad element. That element has always a recognized leader. Who is he?"

"The sergeants will know, Captain—"

"Thank you. Wouldn't be a bad idea for you to find out tomorrow. And what, exactly, is wrong with the Zouaves?"

"The recruiting, Captain," Lieutenant Langre explained. "Where the Zouaves formerly received men picked from infantry units, since the war they have had to take the run of conscripts. Here in Algeria, recruits are a mixed lot—Algerian Spaniards, Israelites, not as yet French in reality. Uncertain material, unsuited to make soldiers."

"The men I have seen here have two arms, two legs, one head," Tarfer resumed calmly. "They have been declared physically fit for military service by doctors. In the Legion—" Tarfer had been warned by Chamars not to mention his former unit too proudly, and corrected himself, "I mention the Legion once and for all—in the Legion we have men of all races and all nations. We make soldiers out of them, damned fine fighters. The same can be done here. I hope to prove it. You may go."

He halted Langre on the doorway—

"You've seen fire?"

"October and November, 1918, and in Syria, Captain—"

"Fine. You and I will get along then. Send me the senior noncom."

Sergeant Bourcard arrived, saluted.

"How long have you been in service?" Tarfer asked.

"Eighteen years, Captain."

"In the war?"

"Fifty-two months, two wounds, Captain."

"The way things are run here doesn't give you a bellyache?"

"Sure does, Captain. But what can one do about it? I was in the Zouaves always, before, during, and since the war. They used to be all right. They're pretty poor stuff now, though—"

"Think it's the recruiting?"

"You mean Algerian Spaniards and the rest?" The old sergeant shook his head. "No, Captain. At the Front, we had a lot of Garcias, Alvarezes, Martinezes as well as Bennouchies, Bentoubouls. They weren't all heroes, but most of them got their mugs smashed as gamely as anybody."

"Then what's the trouble here?"

"The men are babied, cuddled. And they have no pride, no liking for the job, Captain. You'll laugh, Captain, but I think it's the change of uniforms. Look at the poor fellows—they look like monkeys and everyone tells them so."

Tarfer stepped to the window, stared a long time.

The old time Zouave wore a splendid uniform, perhaps puerile in its splendor, but distinctive and flattering to wear. A red skullcap, the *chéchia*, covered his head. He wore a sort of blue sleeved bolero with red trimmings; full, skirt-like Arab trousers of brilliant scarlet, high, white, black buttoned gaiters, a sash belt.

The Zouaves that Tarfer saw still wore the red skullcap and the bolero. But the gaiters had been replaced by olive hued rolled puttees, the skirt-like trousers by snug fitting khaki breeches. This was not an effort to modernize, but a striving toward economy. France, it seemed, was

too poor to afford much cloth for pants.

The effect attained was much like that which would be presented by a West Point Cadet wearing the tall shako and the old jacket with modern riding breeches and laced boots. The costume was hybrid, belonging neither to the present nor the past. It would be depressing to wear it.

"Uh—" Tarfer murmured. He turned to the sergeant. "We can't change that. But we can tell them that a pair of pants don't make the man inside. Call the company—"

WHILE the sections assembled, he thought over what he meant to say. Since learning of his transfer, he had read much on the Zouaves. And he learned things that had surprised him, which he believed would cheer up his men. His speech that afternoon was long remembered.

"Before coming here," he addressed the Zouaves, "I was told so many stories about you that I worried. On your side, you probably worried about me. Now, you look all right to me; you're smart, clean, alert soldiers. Take a good look at me, and see if I am an ogre that devours human beings. You're Zouaves, and I am now a Zouave—" Tarfer paused, then went on in a louder voice, "What does that mean?"

He walked up and down the front of the company, looking at each man in turn, forcing attention.

"The name comes from *Zwawa*, a Kabyle tribe that supplied infantrymen to the native rulers of Algeria before the French came. To cope with a fast, hardy foe, France needed fast, hardy men. A first regiment was formed, all volunteers, men who had to give up corporal and sergeant rankings in other units to enter the Zouaves as privates. As I said, there was but one regiment of Zouaves in those days, and its members said:

" 'There is but one God, one sun and one regiment of Zouaves'.

"Later, other regiments were created, a second, a third. The Zouaves fought everywhere—in Algeria, in Crimea, where they stormed the slopes of the Alma under Russian fire, at Magenta and Solferino in Italy, during the Prussian War, in Mexico. Were they soldiers, good soldiers?

"Listen: When a great war broke out in North America, the greatest war fought until that time, a regiment of volunteers was formed by one of the contending armies, men who wished to have a goal in sight—who sought a name that would be a program as much as a name. They called themselves Zouaves—and were counted among the very best fighters in that gigantic struggle.

"When the World War broke out, the German armies swept through Belgium and Northern France, were about to take Paris. They were stopped at the Battle of the Marne—and the first success of that great victory was won by troops from North Africa, among which were the Zouaves!

"So it is your good luck to serve with the Zouaves, when you might have been sent to an ordinary line infantry regiment. I have told you enough to let you know what pride you may take in the name. Let each man repeat to himself: 'I am a Zouave in the best company of the best regiment in the corps.'

"Your uniforms have been changed, but you are the same men—because a regiment does not change but takes its life from the men who flow through it with the years as the blood flows through the human body. The blood is renewed, but it remains the same body. The men are renewed, but it remains the same regiment!"

Captain Tarfer then stepped forward, singled out one of the men.

"What are you?"

"An Algerian Spaniard, Captain—"

"No!"

"A French citizen, Captain," the man corrected hastily.

"Wrong. You were an Algerian Spaniard, you were and will be again a French citizen. But now you are a French soldier and a—"

"Zouave, Captain."

"That's it. And how do you feel about being a Zouave?"

"Eh?" The fellow grinned sheepishly. "Why—all right, Captain—"

"You feel proud. Say after me: 'I am proud to be a Zouave.'" Tarfer's keen glance saw a few smiling, mocking faces. "It will sound funny at first. But try it—you'll get its meaning after a space."

"I—am proud—to be a Zouave," the private repeated.

"Fine. You have a duty to your country, to serve her, to fight for her if needed, to die if needed. The uniform you wear is the outward sign of that duty. You must respect that uniform and exact respect for it. If any one kids you about your rig, I authorize you to sock him in the eye. Think you could sock some one in the eye?"

"Yes, Captain," the private answered, understanding at last, "any man who scorns my uniform."

"That's the idea!" Tarfer pursed his lips, shook his head. "I have consulted the crime sheet. Nothing serious, and that's the trouble. You're naughty but not bad. Yet you are no longer boys; all of you are at least twenty-one. You are men, therefore beyond the age of childish pranks. I'll expect good behavior or men's sins from you. Dismissed."

This was the first of many speeches delivered by Tarfer. To start with, officers, sergeants and privates repeated them all over the city, before laughing audiences. Certain phrases became slogans, rallying cries, jokes.

"Why so proud, comrade?"

"I'm a Zouave!"

"When is a man a Zouave?"

"When he has dynamite for ear wax!"

Tarfer was deemed an unwittingly comical fellow. His fame spread beyond the walls of the barracks. Former Legionnaires narrated long tales of his epic deeds in the past.

Lieutenant Langre was as amused as the rest, until he sensed the change in his men. The Zouaves chaffed, laughed, but braced up. Petty offense dwindled rapidly. No man cared to be singled out before his comrades to receive Tarfer's sarcastic forgiveness in public, and at the same time some nickname that stuck to him for the rest of his military life. The privates found the ex-Legionnaire understanding, willing to settle their problems when they approached him frankly. They grew to like him, to feel a measure of personal interest in anything he did or said.

"He is a bit cracked—but he means well."

"Nothing escapes him, and if you're in the right, he never lets you down—"

Langre, who had handled the traders carefully according to the custom in Oran, was startled, pleased and admiring at Tarfer's methods of dealing with complaints. The captain departed from the principle that his men were right in any quarrel and must be proved wrong. That is, he investigated, questioned, was never content to dole out a few days of confinement to quarters and to drop the case.

"A man can't stand alone," Tarfer explained to the lieutenant. "To feel as if he really belongs to a regiment, he must feel that regiment, every officer and man behind him always. Loyalty is a strange current that must run both ways at once."

TARFER met the first major test triumphantly. A café owner, a round bellied Algerian, rushed into his office and complained that a group of Zouaves had smashed furniture and glasses in his place. He demanded that the sections be drawn up so that he might identify the culprits for punishment. Langre rose to act on the suggestion, but Tarfer halted him.

"Were the men drunk?" Tarfer asked of the man.

"Some of them were."

"Then one of two things is true: Either they were drunk when they entered your place and you shouldn't have allowed them to stay. Or they got drunk in your place and you collected their money. You want them to spend, you do your best to attract them to your dump, but you

want your profit clean cut all the time. That's not fair business. You should allow for breakage when you elect to do business with soldiers."

"There was a fight—"

"What about?"

"One of your men rowed it with a civilian because the chap innocently kidded him about his monkey vest—"

"Do you approve of the civilian's words?"

"Well, there's no harm in that sort of teasing," the café owner declared. "It goes on all the time."

"Know there's a law against insults to uniform or the army?" Tarfer pressed him.

"The civilian may have been wrong, I admit," the other agreed cautiously.

"Then he is responsible. Let him pay. Good day."

"You won't punish the men?"

"I said good day!"

"You'll punish those men or I'll complain to headquarters. You'll see what it will cost you to—"

Tarfer rose wearily.

"Only one answer to that," he said. He pushed the trader from the office by the nape of the neck, assisted his prompt exit with a formidable kick. "Please tell that to the general when you do see him!"

"He'll make trouble," Langre said.

"All right—"

General Roseny was pleased. At last, he had reason for acting vigorously against Tarfer. Assault upon a civilian was not lightly considered. He sent for Tarfer; although they had not met since their interview in the trench, they knew each other at once.

There was no wasting of cordial greetings. But Tarfer was a veteran North African officer, had handled a hundred complaints, knew when he was within his rights. The moment the trader had threatened him with reprisal, the affair had become a personal quarrel. He had two witnesses, one an officer. In a few well chosen words, he drove Roseny from his position, showed him that he had the choice between publicly condoning insults to the army and to an officer in uniform and dropping the case.

"If you ask for an investigation, General," he concluded, "it will be obvious that the whole thing is what it is—a dirty quarrel—" he smiled grimly; and blurted out what he believed, for his frank character was incapable of fencing longer with veiled arguments, "you had best decide that you have not got me—this time."

"You misunderstand, Captain—" General Roseny paled, and the mottling of his face, which was in reality a sprinkling of large, dark freckles, stood out in clusters of purplish spots on his pasty cheeks. "I'll drop the case. But I had to make a gesture, speak to you. The socialist press is kicking."

"If the papers didn't kick about that, they'd be after something else. They have to dirty their pages. General, last week those very sheets were openly accusing you of participating in shady deals for cavalry supplies. I don't believe that you eat oats, General. And will you believe that I am no more a brute than you are a grafter?"

"All right, Captain, all right."

Roseny felt his revenge escaping him. He had been informed through official channels that Colonel Chamars had asked for the return of Captain Tarfer to the Foreign Legion, for the good of the service. He could not delay the new transfer too long without making his plans too evident. Discreetly, he questioned the colonel of Zouaves. But he discovered to his dismay that the fine old fellow was turning pro-Tarfer.

"Can't understand it, General. The men laugh at everything he says and do everything he asks. They go and talk to him, speak as to a comrade and he permits it. But they never go too far. His officers have withdrawn their requests for transfers and are willing to stick with him. Langre, quite a fine young chap, seems enormously fond of the man. His company has won all the competitions, and although my athletic instructor swears Tarfer knows nothing of sports, his men

make the best showing by far. No, I have no complaints to make. I should be sorry to see him leave us."

However, the importation of Legion standards into a conscripted outfit did not work out well from all angles. For one thing, there was an increase of drunkenness, for Tarfer treated this fault indulgently, seldom punished anyone for it. As was inevitable with very young men, the Zouaves, having found their strength, sought conflict. They clashed with artillerymen, engineers, marines, Tirailleurs. They drank, they gambled, they swore, they fought and caroused like veteran troopers. Where once they had been timid before policemen, they would gather to the fray at the first cry: "Come on, Zouaves!" To the agents of the law they were like so many rabbits suddenly turned into snarling, biting terriers.

The morning after pay day, the Zouaves would line up proudly, almost every one showing traces of violence. They were vain of black eyes, bruised noses, loosened teeth and exhibited scraped knuckles. They had discovered that the really hurtful part of fighting was in the anticipation. During a scrap a man felt little, and afterward the effects were not eternal.

"I socked him before he could open his yap—you should have seen him flop!"

"None of them Arabs can use their fists. All you have to do is kick the knife out of their hand and pile in—"

An extraordinary event revealed the change in spirits. Two discharged men reenlisted to stay with the company. Tarfer complimented them before the whole company, shook their hands and put them in the corporals' squad for training. His unexplainable grasp on men held true here as it had in the Legion.

From time to time Tarfer took the train to Sidi bel Abbès, roamed about the barracks, "taking a bath of Legion" as he told the colonel. He was anxious to return to his favorite corps, and pressed his former chief for a quicker transfer.

"They're nice lads, Colonel. But I'm beginning to have trouble. I don't know whether it's right to make real soldiers out of them. When they go on leave they act tough and shock their folks. Their families write me and ask me to watch over this one or that one. There's an old lady in Mascara who tells me that her son didn't use drink, and that when he was on leave he had to be put to bed every night. That's not good—but you can't tell a man he is tough and a good fighter and then frown when he gets tight. Those things don't go together, so far as I know."

Yet these short visits to Sidi bel Abbès braced Tarfer. He recalled little of his boyhood, he had worked hard and humbly during his teens, but it was here, in these immense barracks, that his real life had started. As he roamed through the halls, up and down the stairways, he knew when and where to expect the echo of his footsteps. When he stopped near the washrooms, he fondled the brass handles of the water taps, which his own hands, among thousands of others, had polished.

During his stroll on the Boulevard de la République, he would hear bemedaled Legionnaires with graying mustaches speak to beardless recruits, pointing him out:

"Tarfer—that's Tarfer—Old Man Tarfer, the guy I was telling you about last night. Well, one day in the Mid-Atlas . . ."

ON ONE occasion he brought down Lieutenant Langre, for whom he had developed a certain affection. They went to the athletic field outside the public park to see a football game between two Legion teams. Tarfer's arrival interrupted the play. For Langre saw the crowd of khaki clad men massed on the cement stand stir, rise, heard a tremendous hail. Many shouted their names, recalled the combats they had fought at his side. The captain was evidently moved. He crossed to the fence separating the players from the spectators, shook the hands offered him. Tanned Legionnaires jostled one another to reach him, grinning, laughing, their eyes wet.

"Remember me, Captain?" one asked.

"Waldmuller, you were at Tiz-Ouzou—wounded around four in the afternoon—glad you got well."

Tarfer addressed other men:

"You're Lazarro. Left you in Hospital Louis at Meknes. And you—sure, at Viettri in Indo-China. Can't recall your name, but you have the hardest palate and the softest feet in the Legion!"

"Say, Captain, when are you coming back?"

"Soon as I can."

"Funny idea, sticking you with the Zouaves!"

"I rather agree with you."

"Think they'll fight in the Riff?"

"I hope so—"

"You'd be with us—with the Legion, eh, Captain?"

"Of course!"

There was some talk of approaching conflict between the French and Abd el Krim, chieftain of the Riff mountaineers. It was certain that in that event the Legion would send strong detachments into the fight—and Tarfer would have deserted from the Zouaves rather than miss the show.

Following that visit, Langre understood Tarfer better. It was something for any man to mean what the captain meant in the Legion, to have become a symbol even more than an individual. And he knew Tarfer to be lonely in Oran, his sole genuine friend being the lieutenant in command of the Legion depot there. At first the Zouave officers had rather snubbed Tarfer, and now that they had dropped their enmity, learned that even a former mule driver might be an excellent man and a fine officer, the former Legionnaire did not show enthusiasm for their company.

He confided in Langre to some extent, dropping hints of his worries. Tarfer was wearying of the prolonged, mute feud with Roseny, constantly oppressed by the feeling of hatred, by the knowledge that his every move was closely watched, that he was at the mercy of an accident, of an incident.

Should one of his Zouaves be injured or killed in a brawl, he would be blamed for urging his charges to stand for their rights, to fight. And as they frequented the cafés of the lower port and the narrow, stinking streets behind the Municipal Theater, they mixed with low caste Arabs, laborers, foreign sailors, all men who resorted to pistol, club and knife easily.

But Roseny's opportunity came from another quarter. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen states that men are born free and equal, that all social distinction must be based upon common utility. That lofty principle holds as true in the French army as elsewhere. Which means that the sons of wealthy men succeed in obtaining certain privileges denied poor fellows.

Tarfer did not object to rich privates hiring less fortunate comrades to do small jobs for them. As a matter of fact, he was enough of a Legionnaire to deem the wealthy man who did not do this as niggardly. But he never granted special favors, never permitted privileges to creep into service matters. He was signing passes in the office one afternoon when the sergeant brought him a note left for him at the barracks gate.

Special leave was requested for private André Fourgues, to attend dinner at home. Tarfer consulted the list, discovered that he had already signed the pass for Fourgues. But he was irritated at the confident, haughty style of the writer, who evidently believed his name carried particular weight anywhere.

"Who is Fourgues, Sergeant?"

"First class private. Good soldier—"

"I mean his old man?"

"Him? Manufacturer and merchant. Lots of dough, Captain. Owns the big factories down near the port."

"Send for young Fourgues."

Tarfer waited until a tall, good-looking Zouave entered.

"I had signed your pass when this letter came. It would not be just to deprive you of it. But will you please tell your father that whatever he may think

this is a military unit and not a boarding school? I grant leave to reward my men, not to oblige the parents—"

"I didn't tell him to write you, Captain!"

"No—you seem like an intelligent chap. You understand that this makes it seem as if I granted you a special favor. Such is not the case; I wish that made clear."

"I wish you'd keep me here, Captain—"

"Wouldn't be just. Doesn't influence me one way or another. Dismissed."

Fourgues was humiliated by this interference with his military life. His father was something of a power in the city and had a habit of freeing his son to attend the big dinners he gave. The dinners bored the young man, and he was happy to have an excuse to protest. Unfortunately, on this occasion, he first drank copiously, then burst into his home. Despite the presence of important guests, he made a terrific scene, at the end of which he left with the threat that he would not return. His mother blamed Tarfer for his actions, formed a union with the mothers of other local boys in the company, and sent in a protest to the divisional headquarters.

Official action was urged to prevent Captain Tarfer from brutalizing young men. The important guests, one of them a senator, were only too glad to repay Fourgues' hospitality by joining notes of their own. While it may be hard to believe that the behavior of a young man in a private home could have influenced the career of an officer, it was absolutely possible with the proper political backing.

General Roseny forwarded the letter of protestation to Paris, with a confidential report written in a sorrowing style:

"The presence of an admittedly demented man, no matter how brave and worthy of consideration, can not but lessen the already weakened prestige of the uniform. Much as I regret to recommend—"

The storm broke into the open. A bewildered cabinet minister was bombarded with charges and counter charges, while the center of the affair, Tarfer, could only shrug his shoulders helplessly. There was nothing he could do, nothing he could say. He had done his best, acted according to his lights, and that was all. Luckily, his attitude, his reserve, had made him many friends among those who had looked upon his coming to the Zouaves as almost an insult to the corps. His real foes were a small clique centering around headquarters.

The investigation was still under way when the Riff mess came to a head.

ALTHOUGH every one in the French North African governments knew that Abd el Krim would turn against France, was forced to turn against France sooner or later, nothing was ready. The man had been underrated, his successes against the Spanish armies discounted with the familiar phrase:

"He licked the Spaniards. Who hasn't?"

The French troops, although greatly outnumbered, did not prove as brittle as had the armies of Alphonso XIII. But if they did not break, they bent, bent dangerously. The situation grew serious. Fez was menaced, Taza was menaced—French rule was in grave danger. Above all, Adb el Krim must not be allowed to gain a single major success, which would have dislodged an avalanche of new foes, the uncertain tribes waiting for a sign to indicate the probable victor.

Experienced soldiers were needed immediately, and the officers to lead them. The first days of the onslaught had taken a fearful toll of commissioned men, more exposed in colonial combats than elsewhere. The Foreign Regiments sent battalions to the front, and the First Regiment at Sidi bel Abbès dispatched the famous Sixth. Covered by his instructions to disregard all save the present need, Chamars took the opportunity to wire Tarfer.

DROP EVERYTHING. REPORT AT ONCE BEL ABBÈS.

Tarfer received the telegram and ten minutes later was throwing garments into

his battered metal trunk. Langre helped him sort the needed objects from the mass of souvenirs and old uniforms that the captain had crowded into his small apartment.

"I seem to be running away," Tarfer grumbled. "But what do I care? I'm glad to get away from Oran. It isn't a place for me. I'm a roughneck, a former mule skinner—and won't it be good to be among Legionnaires again?"

"The case was being squashed anyway, Captain," Langre consoled him. "After all, it all resolved into the squeals of hysterical old women."

Tarfer straightened to light his pipe. The lieutenant was amazed to see his face contorted into an odd expression of grief.

"What hurts, Langre, is that I tried to do right. I've been here five months and wasted my time, wasted everybody's time, and perhaps I have really harmed those youngsters. But, Satan grab me, how are you going to make a soldier if you do not make a man first? Do you think I have hurt them, Langre? I mean, talked them into evil habits that will spoil their lives later on?"

"No, Captain."

"I'd hate to think that, you know! I realize I have had a pretty tough life all along, and that maybe my views are not the right ones for every one. I wish I knew." Tarfer looked at his watch. "My train leaves in thirty minutes. I won't have time to see my company. Will you tell the lads that I—that I am sorry to leave them, really sorry?"

"I'll make up the proper speech, Captain," Langre replied, grinning.

He believed for the moment that Tarfer was speaking for publication, and not too sincerely. But he saw his mistake when the older man touched his shoulder with the tip of his fingers.

"I'm serious, friend. I wish I could have led them out there in battle to show them—and others—what I was trying to do, what could be done with them. You'll tell them?"

"I shall, Captain."

A few moments later Langre watched the train carrying Tarfer home to the Legion slide out of the big station. The captain was safe, joining his own people.

Langre and the company heard of him again a few days later. Tarfer had obtained his first new citation, piloting a company of Legionnaires against the Riffs in the Bibanes sector. Other news came thick and fast. Abd el Krim was hammering at the French lines with one hundred and fifty thousand warriors. The chain of blockhouses was losing some of its links. Epic tales were told of bitter defenses, of youthful officers who had blown their posts up rather than surrender. Native prophets proclaimed that for the Great Feast of the Moslems the Lord of the Riff, the Sword of the Faith, would be in the Sultan's Palace at Fez.

Troops were recalled from the army of occupation on the Rhine. From France, from Algeria came infantry, cavalry, aviation, artillery, engineers, tanks. Marshall Lyautey was replaced by a lesser man in Morocco, and the situation did not improve because of the shift.

"Troops — more troops — still more troops —"

Battalion after battalion entered Morocco, and still the Riffs more than held their own. The Zouave Regiment at Oran detached a battalion to Morocco. But being composed of conscripted men, the Zouaves would not be employed in actual fighting, it was tacitly agreed. They would relieve combat troops from duties at the rear, protect supplies, guard railways, hold quiet sectors, compose a second line of defense.

Like all French conscripted soldiers, they would be spared as much as possible. There were excellent reasons for this caution. Conscripted troops were not seasoned enough to cope with the tough veterans of the Riff. Eighteen months of training was very little to pit against the experience of years, against the knowledge and valor of men who had crushed the forces of one European power and were making an excellent showing against new foes.

Then, following so closely the terrific

losses of the World War, fourteen hundred thousand dead, the Riff campaign was not popular in France. Colonial ventures that cost many lives are seldom praised in any nation until the result is obvious.

The communist press, said to be in the pay of Moscow, grasped the occasion gleefully, published casualty lists, interviewed the mothers of the slain, screamed that humanity was again being led to the slaughterhouse. People had grown skeptical of anything concerned with war. Heroism was too common to arouse sincere enthusiasm.

The High Command therefore was using Frenchmen sparingly, save in the case of officers. Why create trouble, why arouse emotions, when there were at hand Legionnaires, Arab and Berber native regiments, Senegalese from Black Africa, all men who fought superbly, who died anonymously?

So conscripted troopers were given secondary rôles, kept from actual contact with the fierce enemy. When an attack was scheduled, the conscripts left the Front and shock troops were rushed forward. The young soldiers themselves would have liked to play a more conspicuous part. They were normal young men, with normal pride, and suffered keenly from the unmerciful chaffing of the fighting units.

Langre had replaced Tarfer in command of the company. He had served actively in Syria and asked for transfer to a more active unit. His sub-lieutenant, Biot, also was discontented, grumbled and swore when he saw his men wince when hooted and jeered at by Legionnaires or Tirailleurs.

"Eh there, heroes! Did you know there was a war on?"

"Cuties, cuties, come get your noses wiped!"

"Oh, mamma! They shall not put me in the mud. Look at my pretty bolero—"

Even the black soldiers, who knew little French, took part in the derisive chorus, using the few words they had learned.

"Pretty girls! Pretty girls!"

WHEN, by accident, conscripted men were under fire and suffered losses, they were glorified by the government press beyond good taste, their casualties screened by an extravagant account of their valor. For a minor operation such as was the daily task of Legion and Tirailleurs, they were rewarded with many decorations. Wounded men passing by in motor trucks would reel to their feet to insult a decorated Zouave. It was not the noblest part of the campaign and was carefully concealed.

Langre knew that young Fourgues and several others wrote to Captain Tarfer, knew that the officer always replied. But the terse praise he granted his Legionnaires, his descriptions of combats, made the general scorn harder to bear. Fourgues had reenlisted for the campaign, had been promoted to sergeant. But he took no pride in his achievements, did not consider that blistered feet and drilling had been his goal. He took the head of the malcontents, plagued the lieutenant with requests to be employed actively.

"I've offered our services time and again," Langre replied. "Nothing is done. A soldier obeys orders—credit and glory belong to all alike."

"We can fight, Lieutenant. Please ask again."

"Do you fellows suppose I like this myself?"

"We're not afraid of the Riffi. They're guys just like any other Arabs," Fourgues insisted. "It isn't with us as with the boys from France. We know Arabs plenty—always lived near them—"

"Can't help matters, Fourgues—"

"I know what you'll do—"the young sergeant was almost weeping—"you'll get transferred too, and we'll go on handling sacks and guarding old ditches!"

The company had a moment of hope when it marched to the Kef-Kharga sector to occupy positions stormed a few hours before their arrival by the Senegalese, whose dead were scattered in the bushes. The French advance was to resume the following morning at four, and snipers'

bullets occasionally whined near. This gave the Zouaves the illusion of being under fire, and they clung to the hope that they would be sent forward the next day. Moreover, they learned that Captain Tarfer's company of Legion had arrived, and was to attack less than a mile away. The proximity of their old chief seemed an excellent omen, rumors fused into existence spontaneously.

"They wouldn't have sent us up here just for a night—"

"We're going in, sure—"

"About time we did something—"

But, with the darkness still thick on the slopes, the advance patrols of a Tunisian Tirailleurs company hailed the Zouaves sentries.

"Make way, make way—we are the fighters!"

"*Yah!* Zouaves no good—*kifkif moukères*—same as women!"

Those of the Tirailleurs who had gone to school were more fluent.

"You tramps will stay here and watch our coats again, eh? No stomach for fighting—always dirty *bicos*, we are—but nice guys when it comes to risking one's hide!"

Made more sensitive by their disappointment, the Zouaves retorted bitterly:

"We didn't ask you to come here. Get back! Stop where you are!"

"Come on, make way—"

"Stay where you are or we'll shoot!"

Tirailleurs laughed.

"Hear that? They'll shoot! Would be the first time in this mess—"

An automatic rifle spat warningly and the Tunisians fell back, shouting. One of their officers tried to approach, but was warned away. Langre hurried toward the spot and found the men lining the trench, facing the rear. A tall figure detached itself from a resolute group.

"We've had enough, Lieutenant. Either they let us attack or we fight those guys."

"Stop that nonsense immediately," Langre ordered.

"You can press the trigger, Lieutenant," Fourgues said quietly. "You'll only have to go on and kill off the rest of the company. We talked it over, and we'll attack or know the reason why."

"That's mutiny, Fourgues—"

"If it's mutiny for soldiers to ask to fight, all right, we mutiny. Old Man Tarfer is near here, and we'll not stay back this time. We'll hold on against the Tirailleurs, and when the signal to start the attack comes, we'll go forward. That's all."

Langre sheathed his pistol. He sensed that Fourgues told the truth, that his death would not alter the others' resolution. And he was too much in sympathy with the young sergeant's wishes to kill him. It was logical that soldiers should wish to fight.

"I'll see the general and ask permission. Think it over while I'm gone. I'll have to act against you if he refuses."

"We'll wait—and hope for the best, Lieutenant."

He pushed his way through the Tirailleurs, located their officer, explained the situation in a few words.

"By heaven," the fellow said, "I wonder they didn't get wild sooner. Try as I did, I couldn't stop my fellows kidding them. The general is five hundred meters back. Turn right when you reach the mountain battery—"

A few minutes later Langre stood before the brigadier in charge of the operations.

"My men wish to attack, General—" Again he had to explain the situation at length, concluding, "They've turned their rifles on the Tirailleurs and one unguarded word, another disappointment will precipitate a tragedy. They won't listen to me; they've been too humiliated—"

"You share their feelings, I take it, Lieutenant?"

"If you order me to bring about obedience, I'll obey, General. But it seems so useless for us to be here at all. I am sick and tired of being treated like a fragile porcelain. Going back—back—back—every time there's men's work to do. They are conscripted soldiers, young men, but the early battles of the Great War

were fought by men as young and even less experienced than they are."

"You're lecture is interesting," the general admitted, consulting his watch. "But the time is drawing near when we must start. Can you guarantee that there'll be no casualties?"

"We're not afraid, General."

"But I am. You know what will happen if you get badly cut up? The press will call me a butcher and publish a fat casualty list tomorrow!"

"Soldiers are not ruled by newspapers, General!"

"No?" the brigadier laughed softly, seemed to hesitate: "They should not be, I'll grant you. All right, you can attack with the rest. But please ask your men not to die too frequently. What will be thought of me, sending Zouaves into action? Perfectly mad idea—ancient history—"

"Thank you, General."

"Ask the captain of Tirailleurs to communicate his instructions to you—directions, objective, everything—and arrange with him, if the going gets too rough for you, to come and pass through you at a given signal. If your company gets into trouble, shelter your men and stick until all is over."

Langre was already running toward the front line. The news spread instantly.

"We're going in; we're going in!"

HAND grenades were distributed, the section commanders grouped for final instructions. Then all lined up quietly and at the exact time left the trench. For several minutes, they progressed in comparative silence, then the Riffi manning the trenches above them opened fire. Many of the bullets sped down the slopes and the oaths of drivers, the squeals of mules told of hits, in the supply detachments following the advance.

The need for concealment had passed, and Langre was able to shout the command he had so long dreamed of uttering, which his men had hoped would some day be given, an order once famous on the battlefields of Africa and Europe.

"*En avant, les Zouaves*—come on, Zouaves!"

The Riffi made a stand, and the Zouaves sought them out in their shallow trenches. The light was still uncertain, and scenes flickered before the eyes with each explosion of a grenade. Bayonets and butts came into play, and Langre could hear the slapping of the group commanders' pistols on either side. The enemy was shouting, and the women of the nearby villages, close behind the line of fighting, were screaming encouragement. One by one, the automatic riflemen gained elbow room and the weapons opened fire. Resistance melted before them like snow before the powerful stream of a fire hose.

"They're breaking! Come on, Zouaves!" Langre cried.

On the right, a first white rocket had gone up, showing that one of the attacking units had reached its final objective. And there was still work ahead for the Zouaves. Halfway between the first trench and the crest they strove to reach, the young soldiers were caught by a powerful counter attack. There was a moment of uncertainty.

In the new light, Langre saw one of his automatic rifle groups submerged and hacked to pieces by a swarm of warriors. The Riffi clutched at the burning barrel, tore the weapon from the dying man' sgrasp. He ran toward the spot, but Fourgues was there before him, leaping with all the strength of his long limbs. For a moment he vanished under an avalanche of white cloaks, then rose again, holding the automatic high.

"Come on, Zouaves—"

"Forward—forward—don't bunch up! Keep your intervals—forward," Langre ordered.

His responsibility swept all thought of personal danger from his brain; he saw everything clearly. His men had the tendency of green troopers, but were doing well, although the enemy had selected them as the weakest spot in the

line of attack and strove to drive a wedge through them.

A white rocket went up on the left: Objective reached.

"Come on, or they'll send in the Tirailleurs."

The Zouaves beat off the attackers, pursued them. Langre saw Sub-lieutenant Biot, thirty yards away, turn and lift his hand as if to greet him, then collapse. One of the men halted long enough to push the body under a bush, then resumed the climb.

Hand grenades cleaned out the last position, and Langre fired the white rocket. The artillery fire lifted, the shells passed high over head, to burst on the opposite slope. One by one, the surviving group commanders reported their losses. And all strove to speak calmly, in a matter of fact tone—like soldiers.

The Zouaves held the position throughout the day. At four, a staff officer arrived with the congratulations of the brigadier, and the announcement that the company would be cited for "having sought the most dangerous spot in the attack of the Kef-Kharga."

"Where's Tarfer's company?" Langre asked. "I'd like to see him."

"Tarfer of the Legion? His company's on the right of the one next to you, but you can't see him; he stopped one this morning and has been evacuated—"

"Grave wound?" Langre spoke anxiously.

"Through the lung. Bad enough for most men—" the staff officer laughed—"but a trifle to Tarfer. Can't kill that guy."

A FEW months later there was a *prise d'armes* at Sidi bel Abbès, to decorate those who had distinguished themselves in the closing days of the recently concluded Riff campaign. The battalions of Legion and the local unit of Spahis gathered on the Place Carnot for the ceremonies, and were startled to see that a detachment of Zouaves was present, the *fanion* bearer of a company and its guards.

It was noticed with some amusement and no little bitterness that the small company flag was decorated with the Colonial Cross. As the Zouaves swung to their station on the southern face of the public square, along the front of the battalions, the Legionnaires presented arms without enthusiasm. For they were certain that several of their companies which were not decorated had done more than these young fellows.

The officers and men who were to receive medals formed two lines in the center of the Place. The assembled band of the Legion crashed into the "Marseillaise" as General Roseny, who had come down from Oran to preside at the ceremonies, appeared at the head of his staff. Roseny was as pink, as stout as usual, snug in his blue uniform, but although he customarily bloomed in public demonstrations, showed manifest enjoyment, today he appeared nervous, almost bashful.

His sword flashed as he knighted heroes into the ranks of the Legion of Honor; he pressed his cheek against the cheeks of Military Medal winners, shook the hands of those who were granted the Cross. The last man received his award, the rites appeared to be over.

The khaki ranks of the Legionnaires stirred, the rigid lines of blue sashes wavered, brilliant bayonets oscillated, for the men were growing restless, thirsty under the heat of the sun. They expected the order to march away. But their officers gave no signal.

Then they saw the Zouave detachment come forward, marching rather well, unexpectedly well in fact. The young captain in command saluted Roseny with his sword, in a beautiful, sweeping gesture. The Legionnaires approved of him, for they loved the theatrical features of a parade, if well executed. They saw him speak a few words with General Roseny, who nodded with the ghost of a smile on his thick lips.

The Zouave officer then took something metallic from his belt, signaled to the flag bearer, who lowered the *fanion* within his reach. Twice, the scissors blinked in

the sunlight. Into the hands of Roseny, Captain Langre surrendered the small objects he had stripped from the folds of the tiny standard.

"Captain Tarfer!" a staff major called.

All saw Tarfer come forward, a little thinner, seemingly taller. He had come out of the hospital three weeks before. He did not appear quite his confident self. Like Roseny, he was agitated, nervous. But a surprising thing occurred. The general hastened to meet his inferior, hand outstretched. All present knew the story of their first meeting, and realized that the episode was reaching its end.

"Present—arms!"

Company commanders repeated the order, echoed across the spread of glaring cement by the voice of the Spahis' chief. Bayonets and sabers lifted.

Roseny coughed to clear his voice, stiffened his shoulders.

"In the name of the Fourth Company of Zouaves which you trained during your sojourn at Oran, it is a great honor for me, Captain Tarfer, to transmit the words of Captain Langre, actual commander, to your knowledge. At the request of officers and men, and obeying the spirit of their twenty-one heroic dead, the Zouaves of the Fourth Company wish you to accept as a token of their lasting gratitude and affection a small piece of their battle *fanion*, cut around a bullet hole which pierced it at the storming of the Kef-Kharga, and the palm from the Colonial War Cross awarded them for valor, so that you may wear it on the blue and red ribbon already bearing the badges of your courage. Thus they hope that you shall remember them always, as they, in turn, beholding the rent in their *fanion*, will always remember you—"

The tip of Tarfer's naked sword trembled briefly.

"At the same time, Captain Tarfer, I wish to express publicly my personal admiration for you— Your splendid career, your devotion to duty, shall ever be held up as an example to the whole army—and—" Roseny smiled, sincerely this time—"even to the Legion!"

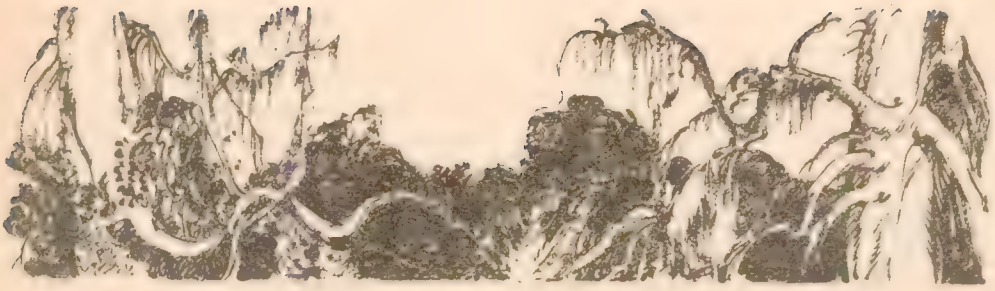
The band played the Zouaves' Marching Song. Captain Tarfer slipped the sword under one arm, to take the gifts. Then he shook hands with Captain Langre, with the tall young sergeant in charge of the color guard.

The band was silent, and all waited for Tarfer's answering speech. The captain sheathed his sword, slipped it from the scabbard again, evidently did not know quite what to do. This form of honor was not foreseen in regulations.

But Tarfer recovered quickly. In this emergency, he was himself. Brandishing the sword, he faced the Zouaves and shouted in a thunderous voice—

"Come on, Zouaves!"

Roseny joined in the laughter, patted the captain on the back. Tarfer was manifestly touched and extremely proud. And the Legionnaires looked upon his emotion as most natural. For this was after all another Legion success.



BAYOU MAN

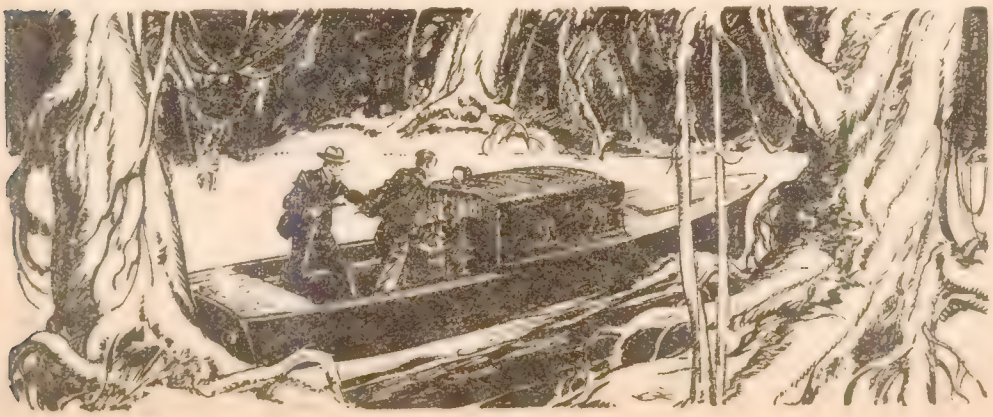
A Tale of a Louisiana Maze

By JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE

PAUL RIGAUD swung his lean, high powered boat in a sharp turn that brought her up against the current sweeping close to Mississippi's shore. He stooped swiftly to cut the motor, and got back to the wheel in time to give it a twitch that set her against the pilings with scarcely a bump. He had leaped to the wharf and made fast before the current could push her away.

Not many men—even in the delta country below New Orleans, where children have boats for cradles—could have made that landing in the swirling river. It was nothing to Paul. He stood a moment in the pleasant warmth of early Spring, and bent the kinks out of his back, cramped from seven hours at the wheel in a cabin a little too low for him. He was going to get that cabin fixed, come Summer. It was hard on a man, when he had to push straight through and get some place in a hurry.

Otherwise, Paul would admit no flaw in the white launch he had bought out of five years' savings. She was his heart,



that boat, and any one who criticized her got a volley of hot words in the odd dialect of south Louisiana, and perhaps a mouthful of Paul's knuckles. He gave her a last look, as if promising to be back soon, and went along the rickety wharf to the levee, standing like a wall for defense between the sweeping river and the narrow farms where orange trees have grown for a hundred years between the Mississippi and the marsh.

Earth felt good under his feet after the long trip from his camp on Breton Island. It was good to be home—good at any time, but better now. For this was Mardi Gras week, when the whole Gulf Coast, from Texas to Mobile, forgets labor and gives itself a good time. All of his friends were here, come back from the shrimp fleet in the Gulf, from the oyster beds, from the bar pilot's barracks at the river mouth, from isolated trappers' camps like his own.

As he went toward home people called to him with questions and cheerful greetings, and Paul answered. Yes, he was going to the dance that night. Yes, he had seen Pierre Mouton down at Port Eads, and Pierre would be home tomorrow. Yes, he sometimes shaved, but did a girl expect him to keep his face scraped down on the Gulf? His quick grin, showing the gap between his front teeth that would always make him look like a small boy, came and went often.

Quite suddenly the grin hardened to an ugly twist. On the front gallery of a dingy house, two men sat with their feet on the rail. One of these was a river man—Old Joe Joret, who had lived there always. The other was an outsider. In the act of speaking to Old Joe, Paul saw this man in New Orleans store clothes, polished shoes and shining gray hat. The friendliness went out of his face, and all the network of muscles across Paul's wide shoulders tightened in an impulse to fight. His eyes, stabbing across twenty feet, met a stare that returned his gaze stonily, saw a mouth that had in its droop the faint suggestion of contempt.

Paul went on, barely nodding to friends he met in the road, not seeing the way they fell back and stared at him. Why should a man act like this at Mardi Gras time? Yet anger showed plainly enough in his walk and the stiffness of his back for those who knew him well. His brother, Louis, saw him come down the ramp which led from the levee into their yard, and knew that Paul was breathing fire from both nostrils.

Louis laid down the wrench with which he had been tinkering a boat engine and grinned at his brother.

"You have seen Pete Joret," he said.

Paul nodded, his eyes blazing on Louis as if his brother were his enemy.

"When did he come here?"

"This evening," Louis said. "Two o'clock, on the mail boat."

Paul was unsatisfied.

"What he wants? Why does he come down here?"

Louis shrugged.

"I don't know, me. Maybe he want to shoot a geese."

He grinned as he said it, and Paul stalked into the house. His mother, when she saw the look on his face, swallowed her greeting and let him pass. She knew that temper, born of a mixture of French and Indian blood, having lived with Rigaud men thirty-odd years, and went to ask Louis what had happened to her eldest son.

JUST before dusk Paul came into the barroom where Lame Bill Snyder and a negro boy were helping along the Mardi Gras spirit with orange wine. This was no speakeasy where men came furtively and somberly to drink themselves drunk, but a country drinking place hardly different from those of older and freer times. The men around the bar were all friends who had trapped, hunted, fished and fought together. They were convivial, happy. They greeted Paul with shouts.

His grin came back as he pushed his way to the bar and took the glass Lame Bill handed him. But the stranger was still on his mind.

"Why is Pete Joret come here Mardi Gras week?" he asked, glancing around him. "What does he want? The hunting season is closed, yes."

Michel LeBoeuf winked at Nick Sanko, the big Slavonian.

"He come to get you, Paul. He wants you to go back and work in that coffee place where he works. He'll give you a big job, him!"

Laughter swelled up and filled the low room, while some one shoved a fresh glass into Paul's hand. Michel had turned his question into a joke about Pete Joret's big talk. Pete was always telling how much money he made in a coffee broker's office, and how much he spent on clothes and liquor and women. Paul laughed with the others and let the subject drop. Later he had a chance to question one or two men alone, but they had no more notion of why Pete Joret had come down than himself, and as the good orange wine and the good tempered hilarity of the crowd began to have their effect, it seemed less and less important to know. His first unreasoning anger at sight of the man had died. Curiosity faded, too.

The dance that night was noisy, crowded, wild. Too many people were in the small building down the levee. Mothers held wriggling children on their knees and looked on from seats along the walls. The little floor was jammed with couples, lithe dark eyed girls and tall, bronzed men, none too steady on their feet. The casks of orange wine, filled a year ago, had been running at the tap all day. These men were full of strength built up through long days on the river and open Gulf, full of vigor and joy let loose after hard toil. In the back room they crowded around the bar, swirled in little groups, went back to the dance. There were two fights before midnight.

Paul was very happy. Three dances out of five he danced with Melanie, whose black eyes were brighter than any other eyes, whose red mouth smiled when she looked up at him. She was like a willow as she danced, bending to his movements as a slim tree bends to the wind. Next fall he would marry her. Why shouldn't he be happy? All his friends were here, his brother and his cousins and the men he knew. They drank together and danced with each other's girls. They stood in corners to mop hot faces and grinned and swore because they enjoyed themselves.

Midnight—which nobody noticed—had gone, when he saw Pete Joret. The New Orleans man stood in a doorway, hands in pockets, mouth drooping in that faint suggestion of contempt. Light from an oil lamp in a bracket showed the indoor whiteness of his skin and the soft flesh beneath.

Again, as their eyes met, Paul felt the muscles tighten across his shoulders. He wanted to hit that man. Melanie felt it, too. She looked till she found Joret, then turned her face up to Paul. She said nothing, but the anxiety and pleading in her expression were enough. Paul's flash of anger passed. Melanie could have what she wanted. He wouldn't spoil her good time.

He danced, and barely noticed that little groups of delta folk sometimes formed around Pete Joret. Most of these were women—Joret was handsome in his way—and it was a girl who brought him again to Paul's attention.

They were standing out a dance when Melanie's cousin came up, towing Louis by the hand. This girl was from La-Fourche, a swamp and bayou parish fifty miles away. All evening she had been having the time of her life because most of the men in the room wanted to dance with her. Now she pouted.

"He's mean, him," she said. "I met a pretty man and he wouldn't let me dance with him. He said Paul would get mad."

Paul's brother grinned.

"Somebody introduced her to Pete Joret."

"What's bad about that? He looks like a nice man. I bet he can dance good."

Melanie took her cousin's arm and turned the girl about.

"You don't know what kind of a man he is. He comes from New Orleans where he makes lots of money, but he's no good.

Last winter he came here and got Paul to take him down into the bayous to hunt ducks. He used to live here and he thinks he knows a lot, him. He bossed Paul around like he was a nigger. Then he got drunk, this Pete Joret, and tried to shoot Paul. Paul took his gun away.

"They came back here. Pete Joret tried to kiss me. I told Paul, and Paul beat this man up. He hate Paul and Paul don't like him. He's no good, that man."

THE GIRL from LaFourche stared, round eyed, at Paul, shot a quick look at Pete Joret where he stood in the doorway, and put up her arms to Louis, who danced off with her without another word. She understood perfectly. Pete Joret was an outsider, an enemy of her own people. It would be very bad to have anything to do with him.

Melanie was afraid there would be another fight then and there.

"Let him alone," she said, taking Paul's arm. "He can come down here if he want. What he does is not your business, no."

So Paul danced with Melanie and the girl from LaFourche until the wine supply in the back room ran low and people began to go home. It was very late when they left, well after three o'clock. Pete Joret had gone as he had come, speaking to nobody. Louis and the girl from LaFourche walked up the levee road ahead, arm in arm, chattering together. Paul and Melanie went slowly, talking about the house they would furnish when Paul's boat had made him enough money.

In a very few minutes they found themselves alone. Other people were walking the levee road. But a mist, rising off the river, had made the dark night impenetrable. Objects ten feet away were invisible, and the great river, sweeping by so close, gave out strange hissing sounds and scraping noises. Nothing was its normal self. Melanie shivered in the curve of Paul's arm.

"I don't like this fog, me," she whispered. "It's cold. It makes everything funny."

At her father's door, the fog, growing thicker, wrapped them round and shut them off from the rest of the world. They stood so long saying good night that Melanie's mother called her in. Paul, happiness full in him, turned toward the levee.

The hard muzzle of a gun bored into his back and a voice said in his ear:

"Put up your hands and don't make any noise. Now, get going."

It was Pete Joret's voice, and anger surged through Paul in a hot wave. Almost, he turned to fight, but the pressure of the gun was sobering. Slowly his hands went up.

In silence Pete Joret marched him up the ramp and along the levee. The blind, wet fog hid everything. Paul only knew where he was by the feel of the familiar road, and the way it turned as the levee followed the river. After a while Joret told him to stop and flashed a light along the side of the road. Presently they turned off on to the slippery planks of a wharf. Paul's boat was at the end. Joret made him get down on to the deck first. He followed, pushed Paul into the cabin, and tied him hand and foot with a piece of light line. He tied a gag over his mouth, too.

Then he started the engine, cast off, and headed down the river.

Hunched in a corner, with his bound legs doubled under him, Paul's anger mounted till he was ready to explode. This Pete Joret—this white faced fool who didn't know a cross current from a backwater eddy, was taking his boat. And here he was, watching him do it. Time after time Paul strained at his bounds till the thin rope cut him. He'd break loose and pound Joret till he couldn't see or stand. His shoulder muscles cracked with the effort and a trickle of blood ran where the gag had cut one corner of his mouth.

Pete Joret paid no attention to Paul's struggles. He stood at the wheel, head thrust through an open window, trying to see through the fog. The Mississippi is no millpond to navigate, even in clear weather, and the man had his hands full. Even with the engine throttled down the

current carried them too fast for safety on such a night.

Finally Paul grew calm enough to realize that he couldn't get loose. The rope—he had bought it himself not a month before—was too strong, and Joret had tied him well. Lying there in the dark, he could barely make out the man's figure when he moved to put the wheel over. But behind Paul was something that had not been on the boat when he left it. The edge of a big suitcase pressed against his back. Moving a little, he brought his bound hands into contact with another, smaller bag.

UP TILL now, he had been too startled and angry to wonder why Pete Joret was doing this. But the luggage could only mean one thing. Joret was going away. The earlier mystery of his presence down river was solved. He'd come to get a boat and go on to some other place. He was running away from something, making a getaway, so that the regular boats and trains wouldn't do. Paul's eyes stared into the dark and his mind tried to answer questions to which there wasn't any answer. The white boat that was Paul's heart went downriver like an arrow.

An hour went by before the beam of Joret's flashlight fell suddenly on Paul's face.

"We're going through Tiger's Pass into the bayous," Joret said. "You can take her."

With the gun pressed against Paul's back he cut the rope on his arms and took the gag from his mouth. Paul, by that time, was calm enough. He knew better than to put up a fight while a gun was prodding him. All he said was:

"How can I take her through in the night? I can't see, no. We'll go on a mud flat."

"You can see in the dark. Your brother said so. You know these bayous better than anybody—to hear you tell it. Now do your stuff. If you make one funny move, or pile us up, you're dead—that's all. I'm not fooling."

Paul took the wheel, knowing that Joret meant what he said. In darkness and a fog that hid everything beyond ten feet, he had to find an opening barely twenty feet across. It was worse than that; the channel ran up one side of this opening, from eight to twelve feet wide. If he missed it, they'd go aground.

He had never tried a thing like this before, not being a fool. But he tried it now, without a suggestion to Joret that he was frightened, without hesitation, or nervousness of hands on the wheel. Pat, the mail boat skipper, could make his landings in weather as thick and dark as this. What Pat could do, he could do. He had to.

Presently his peering eyes found a familiar snag—then a willow tree. He put the wheel hard over and a moment later the boat slowed to a crawl.

"We're in the pass," Paul said. "What you want to do now?"

"Go ahead, sap! On out to the Gulf. And what I said goes. Run us aground and you're dead."

The wheel twitched in Paul's hands and they missed a submerged log by six inches. Paul felt the gun muzzle jab into his ribs.

"Watch yourself!" Joret said.

The man was nervous. This trip, the danger of going hard aground, or ripping the bottom on a log had shaken Joret up worse than it had himself. Paul knew that, now. If Joret didn't get through, something pretty bad was going to happen to him. In his calmness, this knowl- gave Paul a sense of power. He was at home in the mazy bayous he knew as well as the lines in his palm. Joret was in a strange country, a place that he hated. He had to trust himself to somebody else.

On the other hand, these things made him more dangerous. Joret had to get through. If Paul failed, he'd shoot. There was no doubt of it.

For a long while they crept along blind. The stiff collar Paul had worn to the dance hurt his throat and he ripped it off. The cold fog beaded his face and made his hands chill on the wheel. His eyes ached with the strain of watching. Every once in a while Joret jabbed him

with the gun to remind him what would happen if he made a mistake.

Then a faint gray glow crept through the fog. At first the mist only changed color. But gradually Paul began to see a little farther and a little farther. Straggling willow trees along the channel changed from ghostly, dripping shadows to trees. The wall of swamp grass showed, and a muskrat's stick house rose up. When red winged blackbirds came out on the grass stems and swung there chattering, he knew it was day, though they were still shut in by mist.

Light seemed to make Joret more nervous than ever. He could no longer stand still and let some one else guide them through.

"Get out on deck," he said. "Sit down right under this window where I can see you, and tell me where to go."

Paul did as he was told. There was nothing else he could do. When the channel shifted—from one bank to the middle, from the middle to the far side, he held up his hand and motioned Joret to turn. When they had to change from one bayou to another he told him what to do.

There was little danger of running aground, now that he could see. Paul no longer had to strain his eyes for landmarks, or wrack his memory for turns and hidden obstructions. He could keep a lookout while he thought.

IT DID HIM very little good to think. He might dive overboard before Joret could shoot, but that would be certain and rather painful death. His feet were still tied. A man with hip boots and the full use of his body could hardly get out of this place alive. Water moccasins, starvation, drowning, one or the other would get him. He could not fight Joret alone, unarmed and bound. Even if he could escape, Joret would get his boat. Anger rose again in Paul, and he had a struggle to keep himself from making Joret run aground. He set himself to endure what had to be borne.

The sun mounted, but the fog did not lift. As one bayou opened into another and they came closer to the Gulf, it seemed to grow thicker. The close ranked grass ran by on either side. Blackbirds made a little sound in the great dripping silence through which they rode.

Joret spoke, for the first time in hours.

"Did you ever hear of the Rio d'Oro Trading Company?"

The voice brought Paul up very straight, but he didn't speak. The engine's exhaust ticked off seconds while Joret waited for him to answer. He said finally—

"You can't kid me. You want to know why I'm taking your boat. You want to know what I'm doing here. Every bugaloo fisherman in the country wanted to know the minute I landed. They can't let you alone, these people. They can't read and write but they've got to know everything about you."

Still Paul said nothing, and presently Joret went on.

"You want to know, and I'll tell you—because it won't do you any good. The Rio d'Oro's a coffee house in Brazil. And they've got plenty of money, see. I know—I know because I worked for 'em." Joret paused long enough to emit a sardonic chuckle. "But," he went on, a sneering grin on his face, "They ain't got quite as much as they did have—after Pete Joret filled him a bag from the safe!"

"This month the boss was going to ship twenty thousand to Rio. Going to, see? What a laugh! I had the new combination to the safe half an hour after the boss changed it.

"Last night I told the boss I was quitting early to go to the dentist. That was all right with him. He didn't want anybody around while this money was on hand. But I came back, along about ten o'clock. The watchman was down at the end of the block.

"I had a key, and I let myself in. It took me about three minutes to scoop out the stuff into my bag. Then I heard

a noise. The boss had come back too, damn him to hell. He caught me with the safe door open. If it hadn't been for him I'd be on a boat for Guatemala right now.

"I was caught, see? What do you do in a case like that? Light a cigaret, huh? You shoot! Think I wanted ten years in jail? I let the boss have it in the belly and got out of there. I bet every cop in the State's lookin' for me right now."

The channel shifted and Paul signaled with his hand. Joret didn't speak until they were on a new course.

"They won't get me," he said. "Nobody'll think I came down here. I drove my car into the marsh up the river, and walked down to where I could get the mail boat. Once I get into the Gulf, I'm long gone—with twenty thousand bucks. There won't be anybody that knows."

Silence settled again. The white launch pushed steadily toward the Gulf, sending a bow ripple through quiet water to wash up against the grass. The marsh was even more level than before. Willow trees were very few. Soon there would be no more, when they came to salt water.

Again Joret's voice disturbed the silence.

"How do you like it, bugaloo?" he said, and laughed as Paul winced at the contemptuous name city folk have for bayou people. "How do you like helpin' me get away with twenty grand? How'd you like that skinny girl of yours to see you now? You took my gun away from me once. You thought you could ride me and beat me up and I'd take it. But you'll find out different before we're through. How far to the Gulf now?"

Paul looked left and right, and lied.

"Five miles," he said.

"That far? These bayous are crooked as hell. If you make a mistake, bugaloo—"

He meant that he would shoot him. But Paul knew something else, now. Ever since Joret started to talk, Paul's mind had gone ahead of the words, putting the real meaning into them. It didn't matter whether he made a mistake or not. He would die, anyway. Once they passed the bayous, Joret could go on to Texas. And he would go alone. A push, and Paul would be overboard, with his feet tied. The sharks would get him before he drowned.

For the first time in his life Paul really thought about death. He had seen people die—other people. This was himself—Paul Rigaud, twenty-five years old, engaged to marry, owner of a fine boat. He would go out of the world to a place where there was no Melanie with a red, smiling mouth. He would leave his boat with Pete Joret.

THE GULF was very near. He had lied to Joret. It was less than a mile, instead of five. For a dozen yards on either side the passage, flat gray country stretched until mist swallowed it. All the swamp grass looked the same height, level as a table. Water glinted now and then out there. All was gray or sear brown, except the red flashing wings that gave these swamp blackbirds their name.

This was the "prairie" of muskrat trappers who plod the weary swamp miles all winter in hip boots and dugout canoes; of the alligator hunters who come in summer when the armored reptiles crawl from the mud. A desolate country, harsh and unkind; a country men understand and love, or hate all their lives.

It had always been good to Paul. His father had brought him here before he could remember. He had trapped and fished and hunted in the prairie all his life. The great salt marsh was his friend. If help was to come, it must come from this wilderness which now gave back no answer but the call of birds.

"How far now?" Joret asked, and Paul lied again.

"Three miles," he said.

It was barely half a mile. In a moment extraordinarily cool for him, Paul realized that Joret was right about himself and his

people. They didn't know much about the world. Their education was small. But the things they did know, they knew well. No one in the world knew more about boats and water.

Boats and water. Paul's narrowed eyes stared off over the grass to invisible distance; bayous twisting like a tangled skein of yarn over a hundred square miles and more. Jean Lafitte, the pirate, had smuggled his slaves and goods through these secret ways and a whole navy could scarcely stop him. Where a man like Joret could lose himself, a man like Paul Rigaud could find his way.

He sat so long occupied with his thought that they struck a mud bank. Joret leaned through the window, cursing and threatening Paul with his gun till they got off, churning up a yellow wake of mud. Paul scarcely heard. He sat hunched forward, straining his eyes as he had never strained them before. They were close, now, very close. Paul's hands clenched a rope.

"How far now?" In the smothering mist Joret's sense of distance had completely gone.

"Two mile, I think," Paul's voice sounded strange to him, and the last word died in his throat.

Ahead appeared a row of stakes, dim and unsubstantial because of fog. They grew plainer, a mark carelessly made, as if it was not important. But Paul's hand bit harder into the rope. He leaned far out to watch the water going by, judging their distance. Five yards, ten.

"Bear to the right," he said. "Now to the left. We'll hit a bar in a minute, but she'll slide over, yes. This is a tricky place."

They hit the bar and the whole boat trembled as she pushed into mud under increased power. Joret cursed steadily. Then she slid over and moved again through quiet water. No blackbirds sang in this place. Foam went by, and suddenly the boat rocked as if lifted by unseen hands.

"What was that?" Joret asked.

"Alligator gar," Paul said, and lied again.

Another row of stakes showed on their left.

"Hard right," Paul ordered, and the boat swung.

Grass loomed up near by, and blackbirds were singing again. There were no more stakes.

They passed down one lane of water and into another before Joret spoke again. His voice had the sharp edge of excitement.

"How far now? We ought to be there."

Paul raised himself up, awkwardly, because of his bound feet.

"Wait," he said. "I can't see good."

Joret drummed on the window frame and muttered to himself. This bayou was very long. Paul sat tense and still, waiting for the moment he had to face. At last they came out into a lake where three bayous joined.

"Is this it?" Joret asked. "Are we in the Gulf?"

"Wait," Paul said. "This is—I'm crazy! We have got lost, us!"

Joret, instead of cursing, was viciously calm.

"This is where you get yours, bugaloo! I told you—"

If he shot Paul, he'd never get out. Paul knew that; but he knew, too, that Joret had lost his head. The strain of hours of desperate escape since the murder had ruined his nerve. For the first time Paul pleaded with him.

"Don't shoot, Pete. Don't kill me! I'll get you out, me. We just go another way to the Gulf, that's all."

"Yeah, and get lost again in this hole. How far is it?"

"Ten miles. Less maybe."

"Ten—! Listen, if this is a game you're playing on me I'll fill you full of holes like a net. If you're just stalling around till somebody comes—"

"No! I got lost, yes. Anybody could get lost in this fog. Look out!"

Joret put the wheel over and they barely grazed a mud flat. He had

changed his mind about shooting Paul.

"Which way do we go now?"

"Keep on straight till I tell you."

NOW MONOTONY settled down. The great marsh is called the prairie because it is all so flat, so much alike. One waterway is the duplicate of another, except sometimes where a man has dug a straight path to his trapping grounds. Once they passed a trapper's camp, thatched with palmetto. All around were oyster camps, perched on stilts. But their owners would be gone. So Paul took them on their way. They went as if through a room, heavily curtained on all sides, that moved as they moved.

Joret talked again. He asked Paul to take messages back to Melanie—not messages of love. He wouldn't, he said, look twice at a bayou girl. But he told Paul to go back and describe this night to her, how he had helped Pete Joret get away with twenty thousand dollars. Paul knew that Joret didn't intend him to come back. This was just talk to make him feel bad. Joret intended to drown him in the Gulf.

They crossed two small lakes close together and entered a straight channel some trapper had dug. Still the marsh did not change. It was still prairie, gray, silent, bleak. The fog still clung to earth and water.

"This place gives me the creeps," Joret said. "How much farther do we have to go?"

"Two miles. This canal is a short cut."

It was forenoon now. The sun struck down through the mist and made dull glints on the water close by. But it didn't help much. They still moved in a moving room of fog. Paul's eyes strained forward again, peering to see familiar objects the moment they broke through. He had no time to watch the alligator gars slide away or the water snakes that swam across the bow.

Time dragged, now, for Paul as well as for Joret. The fog made everything strange. Marks that he expected to be near were far off. Those he expected to be far came too soon. Joret kept asking how far, and Paul told him any short distance that came into his mind. Somewhere along here, maybe a hundred yards farther . . .

Paul's hand bit once more into the rope. Joret was cursing the marsh, but Paul only heard as a roof might feel rain. Words struck his ears, but did not penetrate. Grass was growing right in their way, where a mud bank blocked the channel. The banks pushed far out to each side. Ahead, no land was visible.

Paul motioned Joret to the right and a moment later they slid between two mud banks into open water.

Joret leaned far out.

"This is the Gulf, huh?"

Paul held his voice steady, trying to sound cool.

"We're pretty near there, yes. We have to pass a couple more bars. This is a mean place, but then you're in deep water."

Joret drew himself inside again and Paul signaled for a swing to the left. They straightened out on a new course. Water slid by, dark and smooth. Their bow wave rolled away and disappeared with a little hiss. Dimly, almost like shapeless arms of fog, a tree loomed. There were three trees in a row. Paul signaled for a little right rudder.

"We could go a little faster," he told Joret. "This is deep here for a while. Open the throttle a couple of notches."

For the second time since they entered the bayous, the boat rocked.

"We're in the Gulf, ain't we?" Joret asked. "That was a wave, huh?"

Paul, who had seen the six foot gar fish rise by the rail, lied again.

"Yes," he said.

Joret opened the throttle and, as the boat picked up speed, Paul saw what he was looking for.

"Left!" he yelled. "Put that wheel over quick. Jam it over!"

He heard Joret spring back to the wheel, spitting words. The boat, moving

pretty fast now, swung sharply. The next instant wood crashed with a great splintering sound and she stopped dead. Paul, feet still bound, rolled off the deck.

From across the water in two directions voices called.

"Who is that? Who is run into the platform? Is anybody hurt?"

"You bugaloo—!" Joret shouted, as he came on deck. "Smash me up, will you! I'll show you how to fool with Pete Joret!" Then, "He's gone! Overboard."

The sound of oars creaking against thole pins came from one side and the swish of a paddle from the other.

"Who's overboard?" somebody called. "What you doing here, you?"

"Get back," Joret said. "Anybody that comes near this boat gets shot. Hear me?"

"You crazy?" The voice said from the fog. "You are smash up and you don't want help!"

Another voice said—

"I'm going to find out, me!"

Joret sent one wild shot into the mist. He did not send another.

Hands reached across the deck and pulled his feet from under him.

JORET struck hard, but he got to his knees yelling curses—swearing he was going to kill Paul Rigaud. He didn't know how Paul could fall into the Gulf and still reach up to trip him, but he'd shoot before he found out. His gun had fallen to the deck. He groped till he found it.

Before he could turn, a hard shoulder struck him from behind. Joret crashed against the cabin—and knew that he was fighting for his life. He turned and fired without looking.

If he had looked, he would have killed Paul. It is not easy to fight an armed man when your feet are tied, and Paul was having a hard time to get his balance after that first rush. He heard the shot strike water, ricochet whining into the fog. He did the only thing he could. He fell toward Joret, who still crouched against the cabin wall.

A bullet ploughed along Paul's ribs, and the numbing shock ran clear through him. But his weight was crushing Joret, and his arms were free. He hooked one elbow around the man's neck and brought them both crashing to the deck.

That was all he could do. Numbness came over him like swift paralysis. He couldn't raise his arms or move his legs. Joret could shoot him now. He had done his best. It was finished.

Nick Sanko and Leon LeBeuf and Julian Joubert reached Paul's boat at the same time. On deck they found Pete Joret lying half under the body of Paul Rigaud. Joret's head was cut where it had struck a bronze chalk. Paul's shirt and coat were blood soaked. His friends found a great furrow and the protruding ends of a smashed rib, close to his heart.

While the other two worked over Paul, Nick Sanko went into the cabin and brought up Joret's bags. In the big one they found clothes. The small one was stuffed with hundred dollar bills in packages. But they did not stop to ask each other questions. Julian Joubert, with tears running down his cheeks, went ashore for a big skiff.

"That Pete is a thief, him," Leon LeBouf said. "He has shot our Paul. If he dies—"

"Look!" Nick said. "His eyes are open!"

Paul blinked, and shook his head. Then his grin came, like a boy's, showing his wide set teeth.

"You are not die!" Leon shouted, bending down. "You are live!"

"Where is that man?" Paul's voice was faint, but clear.

"He is there, with a hole in his head. What happened, Paul? Melanie has cried all day. She thinks you have gone because you don't love her. Wait, we will fix you."

They propped Paul against the cabin and he began. When he told about Joret's taking the boat, they growled. When he came to his own piloting through the pass, they swore Paul was the best boatman on the whole river. But when he

told of passing the line of stakes and how he made Joret turn into another bayou, they laughed until Paul had to stop.

"He wanted to go to the Gulf, him!" Leon said, slapping his leg. "And when he got there he didn't know. He don't know the Gulf from a bayou!"

As Paul talked, the fog began to dissolve. The sun broke it up into shreds, and here and there rifts appeared. Over on the other side of the lake, the roofs of houses showed through willow trees.

It was this that Joret saw when he came to and sat up. Words came from him involuntarily.

"Where is this? How'd those houses get out here in the Gulf?"

The river men laughed.

"You're a fool man," Leon told him. "Paul has take you into the Gulf, then bring you back home through the bayous. This is where you started from last night, yes. The river is in front of our houses, and this bay is in the back. Paul knows these bayous, him. This is how he fool you and bring you back. You're blowed up, Joret!"

Antelope Sagacity

By FRANK EARNEST

A COWPUNCHER riding for cattle on the lonely Arkansas Flats near the Sweetwater River in Wyoming, rode up on a high point, dismounted, and while scanning the surrounding country through his binoculars became interested in the antics of a buck antelope which loomed up in the focus of the lenses, and which seemed to be performing a dance.

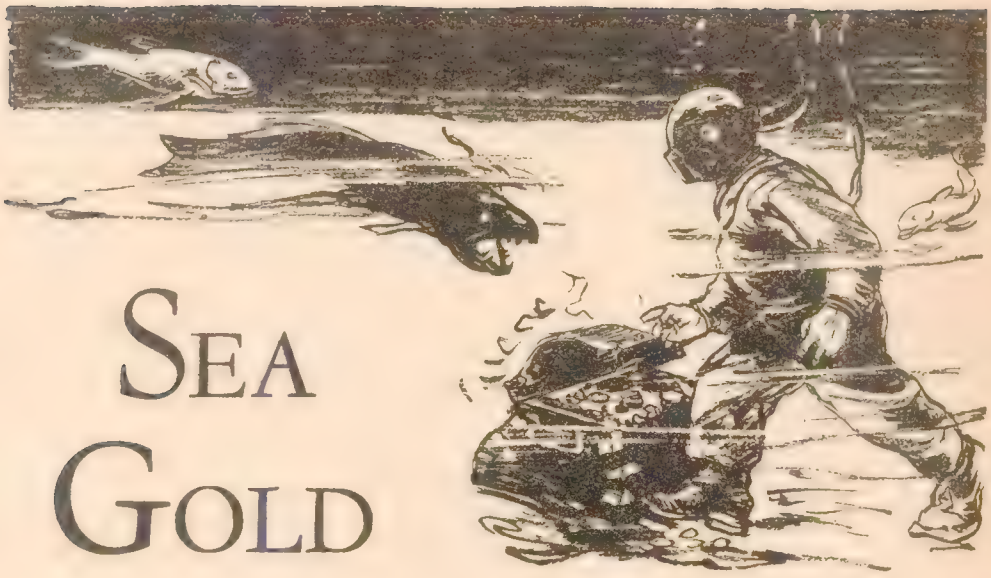
The antelope was walking round and round, jumping quickly forward and back at intervals. After some fifteen minutes of this strange performance the antelope went calmly to grazing. The cowpuncher's curiosity being aroused, he decided to investigate.

Arriving at the scene, he found a large diamondback rattlesnake dead, its head split open. He became aware that he had witnessed a prairie tragedy: a duel between an antelope and a rattlesnake, displaying considerable knowledge, great agility and the highest degree of courage on the part of the antelope.

A rattlesnake can only strike when coiled up, and after striking must re-coil before he can strike again. Any one who has seen a rattlesnake strike and re-coil knows that he does it, as the Westerners say, quicker than greased lightning. The buck evidently possessed this knowledge, and circled round the reptile in an effort to confuse it by causing it to keep moving its head in a circle, unbalancing it to some extent.

It was quite evident from the signs that on several occasions the buck had placed himself in easy striking distance of the snake by springing quickly toward it, and away again in an endeavor to induce the snake to strike, thereby placing his own life in jeopardy. When the snake did strike the buck not only had to evade the poisonous fangs but had also to be quick enough to strike the snake in the head with his hoofs before it could recoil; and that is exactly what he did.

As I happened to be the cowpuncher mentioned I can vouch for the facts in this case.



SEA GOLD

An Article on Sunken Treasure

By KINGSLEY MOSES

AS SOON as the North Atlantic gales abate this Spring an Italian salvage firm will renew its attempt to recover a huge fortune in gold and silver from the bottom of the sea off Cape Finisterre, the extreme westerly point of France.

There, beneath the stormy waters of one of the most dangerous headlands in Europe, the liner *Egypt* lies at a depth of about sixty-six fathoms—about four hundred feet. When the *Egypt* sank, a treasure of five tons of gold bullion and forty-five tons of silver went down in the steel built strong room of the vessel. To recover this treasure from a depth generally considered entirely out of reach of human enterprise is now the salvagers' job.

In the ordinary inflated diving suit with its monstrous steel helmet the record for descent into the depths still stands at 306 feet, a mark set by a diver of the United States Navy in the harbor of Honolulu nearly twenty years ago. Up to that time British admiralty divers had worked at depths of 220 feet or more; and submarine operations at twenty fathoms —120 feet—are common enough, though to be attempted only by trained men in the best physical condition.

For the water pressure on the human body increases about half a ton for every foot of descent, so that, even at twenty fathoms, there is nearly sixty tons of pressure on the outside of the diver's suit. To counteract such a terrific squeeze the diver must be constantly fed compressed air inside his suit. And if, for any reason, the supply of compressed air within the diving suit fails the diver is liable to be squeezed right up into his steel helmet. Only recently, in the relatively shallow

channel of the East River between Brooklyn and New York, a civilian diver suffered that fate.

But the human body, habituated as it is to air pressure, can stand just so much. The explanation of just what happens physiologically to a diver when the air pressure becomes too great is pretty complicated; but, roughly, after a certain pressure has been reached the diver's body cells become saturated with air. Then, as soon as he attempts to rise to the surface again, the cells begin to give off their air into his blood stream. That invariably causes pain, sometimes paralysis, and occasionally death.

Only by a very careful and deliberate lifting of the diver to the surface may the undersea worker have the opportunity slowly to adjust his body cells to normal conditions—from two to four hours, depending upon the depth, is often allowed to haul the diver topside.*

It goes without saying, therefore, that the venturesome Italians who are working on the sunken *Egypt* off Cape Finisterre have had to adopt an armoring more substantial than inflated rubber. Thus far no definite specifications have been disclosed as to the type of suit employed by them, for the work, naturally, is being conducted with the utmost secrecy.

But in the last few years daring experiments with all sorts of contrivances for undersea exploration have been fast pushed forward. We have the metal ball of Dr. Will Beebe, which has been lowered more than fourteen hundred feet into the translucent waters of the Caribbean; there is Dr. Hans Hartman's steel cylinder, with which he hopes to explore the Mediterranean at depths of 5000 feet; and the new device—practically a deep sea cruising submarine—of the German, Rudolf Englemann of Berlin, which is designed for a thousand fathoms. This is substantially the employment of the same idea which the famous Sir Hubert Wilkins will experiment with in his forthcoming exploration of the polar regions *beneath* the ice.

* For a comprehensive account of the physiological action of water pressure on the human body, see Commander Edward Ellsberg's book "On the Bottom."

Presumably, however, the so-called "suit" which the salvagers of the *Egypt* are using is similar to the rigid cell introduced by Neufeldt and Khunke of Germany in 1925. This is a rigid chamber of steel in which a man can stand, looking through thick glass windows, and directing the work of his tenders aloft by telephone. There is also a modification of this cell, fitted with telescopic arms and legs, jointed like medieval armor. In such a suit a diver would be able to walk about a little, and even to perform some simple manual operations. It is claimed that the Neufeldt and Khunke suit has been used at a 525 foot depth.

THE DIFFICULTY in securing really accurate information as to the construction of any diving suit practicable for work at great depths is obvious when one considers the vast amount of treasure which may be within the grasp of any one possessed of such an outfit. The potential value of such a secret is impossible to estimate: millions would be a poor price for a patent that really worked.

For there are fabulous millions of gold silted down in the deeps of the ocean. And the gold of the Spanish Armada, for instance, which lies in shallow seas off the Island of Mull, West Scotland, is just as valid legal tender today as the sovereigns and bars of the recently sunken *Egypt*.

No fairy tale, this story of buried treasure, either! No burrowing in sand dunes or dredging tropical swamps for the fabled loot of a Captain Kidd, Henry Morgan, a Blackbeard or a Lafitte. When a steamer goes down her position is known pretty accurately. As the dying shipmaster in Kipling's "Mary Gloster" says: "I pricked it off where she sank. Hundred and eighteen East, remember, and South just three."

In actual practise the position would probably have been worked out to minutes and seconds, a matter of a cable's length, or less. And if—as is often the case—the vessel sinks within sight of shore, bearings on landfalls will plot the

position of the wreck with extraordinary accuracy.

One of the most notable instances of the successful salvage of great treasure was the recovery of thirty-five million dollars' worth of bullion, gold coin and even silver shillings from the torpedoed White Star liner, *Laurentic*. In 1917, at the mouth of Lough Swilly on the north coast of Ireland, the liner was sunk by the enemy, not far from the spot where H.M.S. *Audacious* had succumbed three years before. Despite the extreme chill of the water in that northern clime, and the fact that the *Laurentic* had been badly bulged and smashed and drifted in by sludge, the divers managed to get every piece of silver out of her at last. But that wreck was but ninety feet below the surface.

Far more difficult jobs were presented by the hulks of the *Skyro* which, in 1891, struck the Mexiddo Reef off Cape Finisterre, near where the *Egypt* lies this Winter. Twenty-five fathoms down she was supposed to be. Actually she was even deeper—170 feet below the surface when finally located.

There are the classic cases, too, of the *Alfonso XII*, down just south of the Canary Islands in 160 feet; and the *Hamilla Mitchell* off Shanghai in 156 feet. All three of these vessels were considered total losses, and the underwriters associated with Lloyd's paid a hundred per cent after the Lutine bell in the crier's canopy had sounded what was supposed to be the final note on the disaster. Yet substantially every dollar of the treasure on all these ships was eventually salvaged; and the independent underwriters had to share between them only the cost of the diving operations and the value of the vessel itself.

Occasionally, too, the present generation profits unexpectedly from the disasters of the past. A quarter of a million dollars was recovered from the hundred-year-old wreck of a Turkish fleet in Navarino Bay. A certain Captain Leavitt found the wreck of the frigate *Cape Horn*, which vanished sixty years ago, and recovered from her a fortune in copper. A chance dive in the Bahamas brought up a chest of Spanish gold worth fifty thousand dollars and dating back a century and a half.

But, for all that, the booty recovered is certainly the merest tithe of the total amount still in the shadowy deeps. A complete list of lost vessels bearing vast money shipments has probably never been compiled. Even a partial list would be tedious reading. But one has to name no more than the *Merida*, down off the Virginia Capes, with four millions' worth of jewels and cash in her strong room: the *Arabic*, with about five millions: the *Black Prince*, in Balaklava Bay, with two and a half millions: the *Islander*, on the inside passage to Alaska, with three millions in gold dust and nuggets: and the greatest trove of all, the hundred million dollars carried by the Spanish fleet from Central America, which got all the way home to the harbor at Vigo, only to be sunk within sight of safety in the bay.

It is easy to understand, therefore, the eagerness and determination which drives men persistently to try to plumb the ocean's secrets. There is huge profit, perhaps, to be won; but there is certainly the true adventurers' thrill in the quest for it.

And now that there has been such rapid development of apparatus by which man may be lowered into the greater depths, it is certain that henceforward the location of submerged wrecks will be much simplified. It will be no longer necessary for courageous divers to impair their health and often imperil their lives as they stumble about in their two-hundred pound harnesses on the bottom of the sea.

Cased in a metal sphere or a steel cell a man may observe much. But can he do more than *observe?*

This is the critical question which this Summer's work on the *Egypt* will probably answer.

Frank Crilley, the Navy diver, who attempted the rescue of the crew of the

submarine *F-4* in Hawaii, was able not only to observe, but to operate, at a depth of fifty fathoms. That stands as a record depth at which a man may really work—handle tools, adjust chains, slice steel plates with a submarine electric torch.

With the present type of diving suit, rubber fabric dress and metal helmet, that record is likely never to be broken by more than a very few fathoms; for it has been pretty well demonstrated that the human body can stand just so much and no more. Commander Ellsberg, in that epic labor of raising the *S-51*, after she had been rammed and sunk fifteen miles southeast of the Brenton Reef Lightship near Block Island, had eleven veteran divers to begin with. Of these eleven of the best of the Navy experts seven were eventually so badly crippled that they could no longer go down for any length of time: at the end only four of the original eleven were still diving. The lost submarine—though the chill of the water was a serious contributing handicap—was no more than twenty-two fathoms down.

It does seem extremely doubtful that any diving suit can be constructed rigid and strong enough to keep the pressure of the water entirely off the diver's body, and at the same time flexible enough to permit the man inside the suit the necessary freedom of movement.

The work done thus far on the wreck of the *Egypt*, before the Winter gales set in and caused the suspension of operations until Spring, has demonstrated that a diver within a rigid—or perhaps semi-rigid—suit or cell, can give directions to the crew of his tender aloft in the lowering of charges of explosives and, to a certain extent, in the adjustment of lines and grapnels. It is reported that the captain's safe has already been recovered from the *Egypt*, though the treasure of the strong room is yet to be got to.

Most fearsome of all in the consideration of the use of any rigid suit occupied by a man is the thought of what must happen to such a diver if his line to the surface becomes fouled.

Pearlers from the South Seas tell a grim tale of a German who invented such a suit for himself—a suit with hooks for hands which he could operate from inside. This man did indeed discover an enormously heavy chest of gold coin on the ocean's bed. He got his hook into the chest's handle. There the hook stuck; and he was utterly unable to free himself. He signaled his tenders. But under the strain his cable to the surface snapped. That man remains with his treasure.

A good many authorities do not believe that work in a rigid suit or cell is practicable, or ever will be. The late Prince of Monaco spent his life, and a great fortune, trying to fathom the mysteries of the ocean's bed.

Yet the Italians working on the wreck of the *Egypt* have already gone a hundred feet farther than it was believed man could descend. How much they will be able to accomplish at that depth their progress during this coming Summer will show. Man can *observe* at two hundred fathoms or more—Dr. Beebe has proved that. But can man benefit practically by such observation?

A Novelette of Portuguese East Africa

JIGGERS

By L. PATRICK GREENE

OUTSIDE the sun was shining with that fierce intensity and brazen hardness which turns the white man's spine to water and the black man's soul, always, to laughter. But in the hut were only shadows; flickering, malignantly distorted shadows.

A half hearted attempt had been made to cultivate the veld about the hut. A broken hoe in the midst of a patch of rust eaten mealies looked as if the last stroke, which had broken the hoe, had broken the cultivator's will to fight the ever encroaching brush.

It was just high noon and the bush was a place of unutterable silence: even the mosquitoes' monotonous drone dropped several tones lower, as if the insects had joined the midday siesta which Mother Africa imposes upon all her children.

But in the hut a bedlam of noises profaned the silence.

The wailing, dirge-like chant of a woman mingled with a witch doctor's shouted invocations to the spirits. And, like a muffled accompaniment to the song of the woman, sounded the beat of a tom-tom. The native who played it squatted on his haunches in the darkest corner of the hut. Awe was in his wide, staring eyes. Beads of sweat rolled down his face and oiled his naked body.

A fire smoked and spluttered in the center of the hut, filling it with choking fumes.

The white man, who sprawled in an inert heap on a pile of skins, opened his eyes with a long, shuddering sigh. His face was covered with an unkempt, gray beard. His head was bald. His black eyes, filmed and red rimmed, blinked owlishly as the acrid smoke stung them.

He sat erect with a sudden energy and threw off the blankets which the natives had heaped upon him. A dirty cotton singlet covered his upper body. It hung in loose folds about his sloping shoulders and hollow chest. His arms were puny, muscleless; his skin a dead, unhealthy white.

A wild scream burst from his lips, silencing the voices of the natives; breaking the rhythm of the drum beats. He jumped to his feet and hit out wildly with his fists, striking nothing, but gasping relief at each puny blow. Suddenly he dropped back on the pile of skins, his eyes closed.

"It is the sleep of healing," the witch doctor whispered as he heaped the blankets again on the man.

But the white man was cunning. His right hand was fumbling beneath the disorder of skins which formed his bed; his dirt grimed, attentuated fingers closed on the butt of a revolver.

Eyes still closed, he drew it slowly out from under the covers. It rested for a moment on the top of the blankets, hidden from the natives by the contour of his body. It was a cheap, rusty weapon. But even now, after years of misuse, it was a weapon of death at close range. It was loaded—all six chambers—with moldy looking cartridges.

The voice of the witch doctor ceased; the woman's song changed to a barbaric lullaby; the beat of the tom-tom was no more than the murmur of insects. Something of the outer silence invaded the hut.

Then hell entered.

With another wild scream the white man leaped to his feet and stood with legs apart, supported by some inner strength suddenly discovered, aiming his weapon at the "thing" which menaced him. Flame and death spouted from the muzzle of the revolver. The witch doctor slumped to the ground, a bullet through his heart.

A shot punctured the tom-tom, putting an end to its voice. That same bullet entered the drummer's thigh and he fled from the hut, yelling in pain and terror. He limped swiftly along a jungle trail which led to the east.

A third shot hastened the woman's flight. Once outside the hut she ran round the clearing like one demented. She called aloud the name of the drummer and when he did not answer, sat down and wailed her despair.

And all the time the white man was shouting and laughing; weeping and boasting.

He went to the opening of the hut and stood there, pointing his revolver at the "shapes" which menaced him. Two shots sounded in quick succession. The bullets passed through the "things" they were aimed at. He pressed the trigger again and again. A howl of dismay followed his realization that the weapon was empty. He flung it from him and, reentering the hut, cowered under the blankets.

The woman, awe in her eyes, only her indrawn breaths checking the continuity of her wailing, rose to her feet and stumbled along the trail which led west.

And so it happened that about the same hour of the late-afternoon, the story of the affair at the clearing had two different narrators and two different audiences.

THE TOM-TOM beater met a young trooper of the B. S. A. P. who was on a routine patrol. To this trooper the native told his story, adding to it, creating a charm making epic of a sordid tragedy. And the trooper, believing that he was on the track of forbidden witchcraft practises, rode fast along the trail leading to the hut in the clearing.

The woman was accosted by a big, raw boned sergeant who was returning to his headquarters.

She would have passed him by in silence, but the sergeant's ears were keen. He had heard her wailing long before she came in sight. That was why he had waited at the fork of the trail he was following.

His questions—shrewdly put in the vernacular—quickly drew the whole story from the woman.

For a moment after its telling he sat motionless on his horse, thoughtfully rubbing his nose. Then, uttering one loud, explosive curse, he dug his spurs into the animal and galloped along the trail the woman had just traveled.

So it is not remarkable—nor over important—that the sergeant and the trooper reined their sweating mounts to a halt in the clearing at almost the same moment. They both dismounted: the trooper hurriedly, a little disappointed because the case would be taken out of his hands, the sergeant phlegmatically.

"What brings you here?" he asked.

"Witchcraft—murder, Sergeant," the trooper exclaimed.

"Witchcraft, hell!" the sergeant replied. "It's only— Here, where you going?"

The trooper jerked his thumb toward the hut. From it came the cries and imprecations of a man in torment.

"He can wait," the sergeant said stolidly. "Nothing you can do for him, anyway. An' you *can* take care of your horse. Unsaddle an' give him a rub down. Do the same for mine."

"But if it's witchcraft, Sergeant," the trooper began.

The sergeant smiled sadly.

"You've been readin' too many wild romances, youngster. You're thinking of ghost beasts, an' God knows what all. You do what I say. I'll take care of the fellow in there. I've been expecting this to happen."

He entered the hut and for a time

was very busy, matching the strength of his powerful body against the frantic struggles of a man gone mad; matching his knowledge against the cunning of a maniac.

He won out, as he knew he would win. He strapped the man's hands to his sides; he tied his feet. After a moment's hesitation he thrust a gag into the man's mouth, choking the flow of filth at its inception. Then he examined the body of the dead witch doctor, wrapped it in a blanket, carried it outside and heaped stones about it.

Reentering the hut, he worked industriously, bringing some sort of orderliness and cleanliness to a place where chaos and filth had existed. He was still hard at work when the trooper came to the door of the hut, asking what to do next.

The sergeant hesitated. He considered for a moment ordering the trooper to return to his patrol.

"But what's the point," he concluded, "of trying to hide things from him?"

"Come in, Grayson," he said aloud.

And when the trooper entered, he continued:

"He's got D.T's, youngster. An' he's seeing things. Look at his eyes—they'll tell you the sort of things he sees. He tried to kill 'em. He never meant to kill that old fool of a witch doctor; doesn't know he's killed him. There's nothing we can do here now. He'll be dead—or better—by morning. Better, I'm thinking, if he's dead. Come on outside. We'll fix up for the night."

It was after sunset. Darkness had already blotted out the naked ugliness of the clearing. The two men were sitting close to the warmth of a blazing fire. The sergeant had knocked down part of the wall of the hut and the flickering flames occasionally lighted the face and form of the sick man.

"There's another good man knocked out by Africa," the trooper commented lightly.

The sergeant looked up with a start from the reverie into which he had fallen.

"No, youngster," he said positively. "You're wrong there. That ain't Africa." He rolled and lighted a cigaret, blew out a thick cloud of smoke . . .

YOU CAN'T rightly blame Wain's condition on Africa [the sergeant went on]. Hell, no.

That's the easiest way. That's the sort of talk a man's always running up against. It's what I call a damned weak alibi for failure.

Say—but there I go. Once give me something to talk about an' there's no stopping me. Don't wonder you fellows call me Windy.

What's that? You like to hear me talk? You ain't, by chance, trying to pull my leg, are you? Oh, well—I got a sense of humor an' I know my own worth. So, seeing as we've got a long watch ahead of us, I reckon it won't do you any harm to listen some more. It'll keep me awake, and if it sends you to sleep, it won't matter much. I can handle this fellow alone.

Now what set me off on this? Oh, I know. You blaming this fellow's condition on Africa. I took exception to that, didn't I? Maybe I'm a damned fool to bother. Africa can take care of herself: she's a hell cat in the matter of standing up for her rights. An' look at the weapons she's got to hand. Hardly a one of them a man's tool. A snake she is, and Lord knows what all, a-lurkin' in the grass. A man's got to tread wary, youngster, all of the time. Put your foot in the wrong place, an' Africa's got you. She don't hardly ever give you a second chance, either.

"What about fever?" says you. Hell! Fever's only her way of caressing a man. Fever don't count.

But be fair, I say, even to a hell cat. But it ain't altogether out of consideration for her that I'm putting you right about this fellow Wain. I'm thinking of your folks at home. You write telling them about "another white man beaten by Africa" an' they'll begin worrying about you. That ain't fair to them, nor you, nor Africa.

This Africa, now, an' the weapon she

uses. The heat an' the rains. The snakes an' all manner of unclean, crawling things. Water holes that are guarded by death—and contain death. Lions, an' such-like vermin. *Tse-tse* flies, mosquitoes an' crocs. Thirst—an' the quenching of it. Loneliness—an' the love sighs of a comely nigger wench. Silence—an' the beat of tom-toms which set the heart a-throbbing and make a white man think in circles—nigger fashion—which lead back upon himself. The big things and the little things—like the jigger flea.

Now it's funny about the jigger flea—one of the curses of Africa, men say. Yet it ain't a native of Africa. It was forced on her, brought without a by your leave, like a lot of other things I might mention such as booze an' work, an' missionaries an' such-like.

But about the jigger now. I can tell you the story of its beginnings. An' if you think I'm wandering off the subject—the said subject being this fellow Wain who lies a-snoring here like a hog—then listen to this:

I say that this fellow, Wain, is lying here like he is, because a Dago windjammer named the *Santa Maria* got wrecked on the shores of Africa a hundred years or so ago. Tall story, says you? Listen to the proving of it.

The *Santa Maria* was homeward bound from the West Indies. An' because she had no cargo, she carried ballast. Well, what with contrary winds, an' currents, an' too much Jamaica rum on board, the *Santa Maria* got way to the south of her proper course. The first land she hit up against after leaving the West Indies was the West Coast of this black Africa. What I mean, she hit up against it—hard! It was night an' dark, an' the lookout, I'm thinking, was more interested in his rum ration than anything else. An' the captain an' the crew was singing so's they wouldn't hear the howling of the wind.

A breaker—they roll real big off that coast; I've seen 'em—got up under the *Santa Maria's* stern an' picked her up an' slammed her down good an' hard on the sandy beach at Ambriz. Ambriz being now a port of sorts in Angola. It wasn't even a name, then.

An' when the sun rose the tide had gone down, an' there was the *Santa Maria* with her nose wallowing in the sand as if she'd been there all her life. An' her crew—such as was left of 'em—walked ashore an' gave thanks to the God what watches over drunks an' fools.

An' they went their ways to their appointed ends.

BUT THE *Santa Maria* remained, until time an' the elements rotted her timbers an' burst her apart. An' the sand, which was her ballast, mingled with the yellow sand of the beach at Ambriz. I can see in my mind's eye a happy family of jigger fleas riding in to Africa on every particle of that ballast sand. Hell! It was made easy for 'em. They was brought over traveling snug an' warm in the *Santa Maria's* hold an' spread gently on the soil of Africa. An', man, didn't they thrive!

You ain't made the acquaintance of a jigger yet, have you? You will. They've spread themselves pretty well all over the face of Africa since they came ashore, a hundred years ago.

They like nice sandy soil; but better than that they like to lay their eggs under a man's toenail. So here I'm chucking in a bit of veld craft for you, youngster. Don't you go aping a nigger an' go about with bare feet. An' don't, neither, leave your socks lying on the ground. An' if, so be, you're ever stationed in jigger country, let a nigger examine your toes every night.

You'd think, judging from the way the niggers know how to remove the blamed pests, they'd been fighting jiggers ever since the world began. But I'm telling you there wasn't a jigger in the country till the *Santa Maria* spilled her ballast the way she did.

Maybe you think I'm talking too much about jiggers. Only a flea, you say. Well, that same flea's crippled more than one

good man. It's affected the political status of a good slice of this "grab an' keep it" continent. I'm not aiming to prove that to you right now, but I could.

Anyway, the chief point I'm aiming to get fixed in your mind is the way these things, which folks are apt to call happenstance, link up, more often than a fellow likes to admit, with fate. As, for instance, that sand ballast of the *Santa Maria* an' John Wain who snores there an' may, or may not, see the morrow's sunrise.

Let me tell you about it.

If my memory of times an' places, or of the color of a man's hair, or what he wore, is sketchy, you can take it from me that the main points are as I give 'em. An', come to think of it, what *does* it matter what the color of a man's hair was?

Before I joined the police, I was wanted by the police. There was times, in them days, when I was content to lay low for a bit—out of the way of the police. An' that brings me to the beginning of things.

I was "resting" in a place at Lourenço Marques at the time—at Taffy Evans'. An' Taffy's was a filthy dive if there ever was one. There wasn't anything too big, or too small, or too rotten for him to handle. Women, wine an' song were only the beginning of things at Taffy's. He'd finance a gun running expedition an' another expedition to do the stand-and-deliver business on the first. But what was most important about the dive from my end of it at that time was that the police steered clear of the place. And another thing. At Taffy's a feller could get a line on a job—if he wasn't too particular what that job was.

Well, there I was in Taffy's saloon, sittin' in a corner, tiltin' my chair back, my feet up on the table in front of me, my shoulders touching the walls on either side of me. I'd got my fingers hooked into my belt. An' I was minding my own business, but on the alert to see that nobody made my business theirs.

There was a bit of a commotion presently. A row between one of the girls and a dago. The girl claimed this dago had insulted her—though I don't see how he could—an' she gave him a barmaid's kiss. Don't go hankerin' after one of them, youngster. A jab in the face with a broken tumbler marks a man for life.

One quarrel in a place like that acts like as if it was a catching disease. In less than no time there were five or six fights in progress—knife play, mostly. An' me, I reckoned it was as good a time as any to have a look at my gun. There was a fellow in the room who didn't have much love for me. I figured if he saw my gun, that'd inoculate him against this murder fever that that barmaid's kiss had started.

I ought to have known better. He was a good knife thrower. But a bullet travels a darn sight faster than a knife—an' hits harder. I never did hear whether he learnt that lesson.

Taffy was set against wholesale bloodshed. There was always a danger some of the girls might get hurt, or the plate glass mirror back of the bar smashed, or the mahogany counter scored. An' Taffy was strong for the protection of his property.

An' now he set his bullies to work. They was organized an' it didn't take 'em long to put an end to the fights. They croaked one or two in the process—squarin' Taffy's private grudges. An' when, presently, the door opened an' some newcomers entered, all was as nice an' friendly as a Sunday School social.

I broke my gun, cleaned an' reloaded the used chamber; but I kept my eyes on the men who'd just come in. They interested me above a bit.

TWO of 'em was, obviously, greenhorns. They was dressed in the sort of clothes that you see advertised in the home papers as "ideal for the tropics." They was youngish fellers—about my age, I reckoned. But they looked a damned sight younger. Nothin' like Africa an'

fever to age a man. An' I'd had plenty of both.

Well, them two stood sort of huddled together; the way they fidgeted made it plain to see that they was afraid of the place—an' of their company. Good reason, I'm thinking. The five with 'em was the dirtiest crooks that had ever set foot inside Taffy's place. That'll give you their measure.

Naturally, I wondered what was in the wind; wondered what them crooks was doin' at Taffy's with two greenhorns; wondered what they was talkin' so earnestly to Taffy Evans about.

Course I didn't take too open an interest in 'em—a man had to mind his own business in Taffy's—but I'm tellin' you I didn't miss much of what was goin' on.

They all sat down at a table not far from mine, presently, an' I heard scraps of their talk—they was tellin' stories, mostly. They had a round or two of drinks—"Taffy's Specials," they was. Liquid dynamite, them drinks was, believe me. The two greenhorns began to perk up a bit; didn't act so nervous. 'Specially one of 'em. He got red faced an' loud mouthed. He took his turn at tellin' stories. They was Sunday School yarns, I'm thinking, compared to the ones them others were telling; but they went down well. Nothing like laughin' at a man's stories to break down his barrier of defense.

An' then this same greenhorn began to make eyes at one of the girls; he shouted to her. I wasn't such a moral living fellow that I could find fault with that. But this greenie—well, the girl he'd picked on, she was a halfcaste. She wasn't even that—she was a damned sight nearer the black than the white, if you know what I mean. An' a white man—a white man's got to be a white man in this country.

The other greenhorn didn't like the way his chum was carryin' on, an' he must have said so because there was some cursin'. An' the first greenie—he had this girl sittin' on his knee—shouted that he was old enough to take care of himself. These five tough babies laughed, an' patted him on the back. They flattered him, an' ordered another round of drinks.

I began to lose all interest in 'em. It looked to me like a pretty small game. I figured the five crooks was going to get the two youngsters drunk, rifle their pockets an' let em' go. But when, presently, they all—all, that is, except Taffy an' the girl—rose an' went into an inner room, it was on my mind to go after them an' warn them two boys. But I wanted to live, so I minded my own business. Specially as Taffy was watchin' me close. He rose an' sidled up to my table—it wasn't by chance that my gun covered him.

"You ought to know me better than that, Yank," he said. My mother's speech was strong with me in them days. I've lost most of it in the years that have passed. Reckon I'd pass for a Limey most anywhere.

"It's because I know you so well, Taffy," I said, "that I do what I do."

Taffy shrugged his shoulders and sat down.

"Did you hear any of their talk?" he asked, jerking his thumb toward the door which had closed behind them seven.

"Bits here an' there," I said. "Nothin' worth listening to."

"Ah!" he said. "Your ears ain't as keen as they might be."

"Keen enough, Taffy. Anyway, I reckon I know all the stories they told."

"I wasn't thinkin' of the stories." Taffy said thoughtfully. "An' you didn't hear anythin' else?"

I shook my head an' yawned. I knew Taffy had some little game on which he'd put before me in his own time, in his own way. He always had to beat about the bush; he could never come straight to the point.

"What did you make of them two greenhorns?" he asked.

"They *are* green, ain't they?" I replied. "That about lets them out. As far as I can see they're no different than any other fools just out who think, just

because they're in Africa, they can let down the bars. They'll have empty pockets an' thick heads when they wake up on their boat tomorrow. But why bother about 'em?"

Taffy drummed his fingers on the table top. Then he said suddenly—

"How'd you like to go on a little expedition, Yank?"

I laughed inside. I guessed there was somethin' big on. Taffy was gettin' to his point quicker than usual.

"That depends on a lot of things," I said.

"Such as?"

"Where, what for, an' what do I get out of it?"

"I can't tell you any of them things," Taffy answered, "because I don't know."

"Then I ain't interested," I said.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Yank." Taffy leaned forward an' lowered his voice. "Listen; you was tellin' me this mornin' that you wanted to get out of this *dorp*. You were itchin', you said, to go on trek. But you've got no money to outfit an' don't know where to go. Well, I'll grubstake you. Listen; them in there are after somethin' big. Butcher Hines told me that much. It's buried treasure, or somethin', the greenhorns have got wind of."

Well, that made me laugh.

"You can laugh, Yank," said Taffy. "But I tell you they're on to somethin' big. They've got somethin' more than a lot of fool theories to go on. It ain't likely," says Taffy, "that Butcher Hines'd be taken in by the usual buried treasure talk."

BUTCHER HINES—I ought to have told you—was one of the five men who had gone into the inner room with them two greenhorns. Butcher was a cunning devil; crooked as they make 'em. An' what Butcher didn't know about the country ain't worth talkin' about.

"True enough," I admitted to Taffy. "Butcher ain't the sort of man to waste his time on any half baked yarn a couple of greenies could tell. He's after treasure, all right. But I'm thinkin' it ain't buried very deep: no deeper, I'm saying, than them two greenies' pockets. He'll milk 'em dry an' let 'em go."

"That's where you're wrong, Yank," Taffy comes back quick. "Them two fellows ain't got enough money to interest a man like Butcher."

I began to think there might be something big hatchin' in that room; an' I itched to be in on it. There's nothin' like buried treasure talk to break down a man's ideas—not to mention ideals.

"Where do we come in, Taffy?" I asked.

"Easy, my boy," he said with a grin. "I'll outfit you—on half shares—for a labor recruitin' trip. An' all you've got to do is follow their trail. Find out what they're after an' where they're goin'. I'm leavin' the 'how' of it to you. An' when they've got what they're after, it'll be up to you to take it from 'em. Bring it back here an' we'll share fifty-fifty. An' I'm being generous, my boy," says Taffy.

"Generous as hell," I growled. "But you've forgotten to tell me how I'm to take the stuff—whatever it is—from them. There'll be seven of them—"

"No," he interrupted. "Only five, Yank."

He grinned, an' I grinned. Of course, you understand, Butcher an' his mates'd give the two greenhorns the slip, once they'd located the treasure. Maybe they'd kill them. No matter how, or what they'd do, it was a sure thing I'd only have five, at the most, to deal with. But five to one's not so good. I said so to Taffy.

"Well," he said, "I could send some of my boys with you. But that wouldn't be so nice for you, Yank."

I knew what he was hinting at, the slimy old murderer.

"Besides," he continued. "You've got a big reputation as a veld man, Yank. You can do the job better alone. I'm trustin' you. Shall we shake hands on the bargain?"

I hesitated: I considered all the ways

Taffy might doublecross me—an' probably would.

"Come on, Yank," says he, impatient-like, holdin' out his hand. "Or are you," he added with a leer, "feelin' sorry for them two greenies? You being a soft hearted fool at times. But hell," he said, "they ain't worth thinkin' about. Come to think of it," he said, "it'd be a kindness to see they don't get the treasure. That's true of one of 'em, at any rate. He's just tough enough to think he can handle women an' liquor. So we'll be doin' him a kindness to see he don't get the treasure."

The idea of Taffy doing a kindness made me laugh.

"I wasn't worryin' about them two," I told him. An' I was just goin' to take his hand, sealin' the bargain between us, havin' thought I'd seen a way of getting round any doublecrossing he might attempt, when there sounded a hell of a din in that room where the seven had gone. A revolver shot, an' the thud of tables an' chairs being overturned; men cursing an' a yelp for help. The folks in the bar tittered an' Taffy said:

"That makes it easier for us, Yank. Butcher's reducin' his party already, I'm thinkin'."

What else he said, I don't know, because I snatched up my gun, jumped to my feet, an' rushed across the saloon to that room where all the uproar was comin' from. I ain't tryin' to explain why I did it. It was contrary to my habit of mindin' my own business. I reckon I was just curious to know what was goin' on. So don't you go puttin' it down to any heroic act on my part. Nothin' like that. I wasn't any blamed hero—only, now I think of it, a damned fool.

I heard all sorts of shoutin' an' cursin' from the folks I brushed out of my way; an' a clatter of tables an' chairs overturnin' an' tinkle of broken glass. I felt a draft blow by my head an' heard the report of a revolver. Taffy's men were havin' a pot shot at me on general principles. That speeded me on. The next minute I was in that room where all the noise was comin' from. I closed the door behind me an' locked it.

The next moment I wished I hadn't. Wished, too, that I hadn't been so blamed inquisitive.

I'D INTRUDED into a nice pack of trouble, believe me. A good bit of it dropped on my head. What I mean, a feller swung at me an' broke a bottle on my head. I went down, but not out. I've always reckoned since there must have been a flaw in that bottle. Anyway, I slid to the ground, half blinded by the whisky which ran down my face, an' it sort of counteracted the effect of the blow. Kept me from goin' out entirely. But I was dazed above a bit. Flashes of color kept distortin' my vision. The walls kept whirlin' round; tables an' chairs seemed to be dancin' about of their own accord. An' yet, funny enough, I didn't hear any sound except a roarin', like surf, in my ears. Then I saw a feller—somehow I recognized him; knew it was Butcher Hines—sort of float to the ground. He came to a rest a-sprawl across my legs, an' he was grinnin' up at the ceilin'. His face was streaked with red paint.

That struck me as funny. I remember I wanted to ask him what fancy dress ball he was goin' to. Then I touched the streaks of paint, an' that cleared my senses proper. There was a bullet hole drilled right in the middle of Butcher's forehead. He held the neck of a broken bottle in his right hand. One of the chambers of my revolver had been fired.

I got to my feet, slow-like, my gun ready. The place looked like a shambles. Broken chairs an' tables, spilt liquor everywhere. There was some gold fish floppin' about in a puddle of pinkish colored water on the floor. The bowl they'd been in had been overturned, an' the water kept getting redder. There was a river flowin' into it. I looked to the source of it an' saw a man sprawled on his belly. His hands were stretched out above his head. There was a knife

buried between his shoulders. That river flowed from him.

Not far from him was one of the greenies, out to the world, sittin' with his back to the wall. He had a bottle in his hand, but it wasn't whisky that had put him out. He'd got a bump over his left eye. As I looked at him he toppled over sideways an' his head cracked against the floor.

In a far corner, his buddie was puttin' up a good fight. He was swingin' a heavy chair, an' he'd done some execution with it. There was a man knocked dizzy at his feet, an' the other two who were attackin' him hadn't escaped unmarked.

But the lad with the chair was beginnin' to weaken, an' he failed to parry a knife thrust. The keen edge sliced across his forearm. He nearly dropped the chair an' the two sprang in to make a finish. At the same time the feller on the floor, the one I thought had been knocked out, caught hold of the greenie's leg an' pulled him off his balance.

Well, I was damned sick with myself for gettin' mixed up with the business. I'd have got out of it if it had been possible. Figure for yourself the mess I was in. Butcher dead, an' I had killed him. Not that my conscience troubled me over that. I figured that justice was in my debt about that. But there was three of his pals in the room who'd want to square the account with me. Not to mention them out in the saloon. Some of 'em was beginnin' to pound on the door. Their shots was splinterin' the woodwork.

I'd liked to have got out of it, but I reckoned always to mind my own business an' a three-to-one fight I've always made my business.

"Stick 'em up!" I yells from across the room.

The two with knives an' the one on the ground look toward me. That gives the feller with the chair a chance an' he bashed it down on the head of one of them. Shifty Lane, it was, an' a dirtier rat hasn't been spawned. I laughed at the look of surprise which spread over his face just before he toppled to the ground. That blow must have used up all the greenhorn's strength, for he went down too.

The other two—they had sense. They knew what I could do with a gun. They made a show of surrender an' wanted to parley with me.

"Let's get together on this, Yank," said the feller who'd grabbed hold of the greenie's leg. He answered to the name of Soapy. It fitted him—that's all I know about him. He got to his feet. "There's no sense squabblin' between ourselves. We're on to a good thing. Plenty for us all—"

But I wasn't in no mood to stand discussin' ways an' means with men like Soapy an' Slicer Cann—that was the name of the other feller. Neither of 'em could play a square game if their lives depended on it. Besides, them in the saloon was beginnin' to smash the door in. Taffy built strong for reasons of his own, but no door was goin' to stand the poundin' that one was bein' given for long.

"You chuck your knives an' guns over here," I said.

Soapy obeyed; an' so did Slicer. He was smart with a knife. He nearly got me.

"It slipped out of my hand, Yank," he whined. The rat!

"That's one slip you'll pay for," I said. "Now turn round, both of you."

THEY obeyed—they had to. A gun makes a powerful persuader. It was easy. A tap on the head with the barrel of a revolver is apt to make a man lose all interest in the proceedings for a bit. I didn't hit 'em very hard. Cold blooded killin' never did appeal to me. But the window was pretty high up an' I didn't want them botherin' me. I set a table up on its legs an' set a chair on the table. By standin' on the chair I could reach the window sill easy.

The greenhorn who'd been playin' with the chair got to his feet an' came swayin' toward me, his hand outstretched.

"Thank God you came in time," he

said, or some highfalutin stuff like that.

"Never mind about that," I said, sharp-like. "Hope to God we can go in time. Up you go—"

An' I held the table steady whilst he climbed up on it, mounted the chair an' pulled himself up to the window. There he halted, a puzzled look on his face.

"Get on with it, you fool," I yelled, for the door was beginnin' to give. One of the panels was splintered an' a feller was shootin' through it.

An' this greenie, the young fool, lets go an' drops to the floor.

Me, I was madder'n hell. But I sprayed some shots at the door, keepin' them on the other side from actin' too precipitous. An' the greenie picked up his chum, chucked him across his shoulder an' climbed up to the window with him. I followed close behind him, believe me.

Next second, just as I heard the door cave in, we'd dropped to the ground on the outside, an' we legged it from the place for all we was worth. An' I was carryin' the unconscious greenie—his chum havin' enough to do to take care of himself.

Taffy Evans sent his bullies after us an' the knowledge of what they'd be likely to do to us if they caught us made me run faster than I knew how.

It was lucky I knew my way about that part of the *dorp*. It was a maze of dark alleys. No place for a man to take a walk for the good of his health. They practised blood lettin' pretty promiscuously in the neighborhood. Once or twice dark shadows of men stood in our path an' tried to stop us. We bowled 'em over like as if we'd never seen 'em. Yellow flames cut the darkness. Lights went out behind some windows an' appeared in others. There was quite a pandemonium, believe me, what with men yellin', revolvers goin' off an' police whistles blowin',

Then this feller I was carryin' began to groan an' mutter, wantin' to know what it was all about.

An' the other one, he gasped he was all in. Couldn't run another step, he said. Wanted me to run an' save myself. The damn fool wanted to be a hero. I'd have gone, but I was winded myself. So I set down the feller I'd been carryin' an' told the other one what to do. The next moment we was reelin' back the way we'd come, arm in arm, singin' like drunks would sing. But I'm gamblin' no drunk was ever as ready to spray lead as I was—if the occasion called for it. Feelin' as I did, I hoped it would. That run had hurt my dignity.

Pretty soon we came to the place of a feller I knew. A white man, if there ever was one.

I knocked on his door in a certain way, then we waited, cowerin' up against the wall.

The light disappeared from the window. The door opened and a voice said—it came from a darkness you could cut with a knife—

"Come in, quick!"

I pushed them other two—they was sort of hangin' back—in before me. The door closed behind us. A chain was hooked on an' an iron bar added just as an additional precaution.

Then there was a spurt of flame. The next moment a lighted lamp showed us to each other—an' showed us a room as well furnished—Persian carpets an' grand piano—as any I've ever seen.

I sat down in a big chair an' grinned at the amazement on the faces of them two greenhorns. I understood what they was thinkin'. I'd thought that way myself when I first set eyes on Zulu Tom—the nigger whose place it was.

He was a giant of a man. Seven foot and one inch in his naked feet—an' they was generally that way. He was big in every way: muscle an' heart. He had one of these falsetto voices with a bit of a lisp in it. Most always when he went out he dressed in a clergyman's uniform—white choker collar an' everything. But he was happiest dressed like he was now—nothin' on but a leopard skin about his middle. He'd told me once he'd killed that leopard with his naked hands. I'd have believed him if it had 'a' been an elephant's skin. An' yet, despite his size

an' his muscles, he talked an' acted like as if he was a perfect dude. I'm sayin' that that's one thing Zulu Tom wasn't.

"So it's you, Baas Yank," he said to me. "What can I do for you?" I've been told he'd been educated at an English college.

"Taffy Evans' crowd's after us," I said.

"Ah!" He grinned. "Perhaps they'll look for you here."

HE GRINNED some more, an' I grinned too. If there was one thing the scum of Lourenço Marques had learned, it was to leave Zulu Tom alone. Apart from what he was himself, that nigger had friends who could take care of themselves, an' him. Chinese an' Indians an', of course, pretty near every nigger that ever came to the *dorp*. Most of 'em served Tom free gratis an' for nothin'—the niggers, anyway. Somethin' about his birth an' ancestors made him the boss man of 'em all.

As for the chinks an' coolies that hung on to him—givin' an' receivin' protection—he paid them. A rich son of a gun was Zulu Tom. I'll tell you about him some day. Tell you why he hung out in that shack at Lourenço Marques. It's a damn interestin' yarn.

That don't belong to this tale. Neither does Zulu Tom, for that matter. His place was only a sort of station on the way to what happened next.

Well, we stopped grinnin' at each other an' looked at the two fellers.

"Friends of yours?" asks Zulu Tom.

"Seen 'em tonight for the first time in my life," I growled, an' told Tom all I knew of things. "An'," I concluded with a curse or two, "the hell of it is, Tom, I'm broke; got nowhere to go. I'll never be able to go back to Taffy Evans'. Worse than that, I daren't stay in the *dorp*. They'll come gunnin' for me, an' how in hell I'm goin' to get out of the place alive is more'n I know."

One of the greenies—him that had been wieldin' the chair—had a deep gash in his arm, an' he'd lost a lot of blood. He was plucky about it. The other one—he had nothin' but a swellin' eye; but he kept complainin' in a whiney sort of voice. Said he felt sick. Maybe he did, at that. He'd drunk more'n he could handle. An' me—I was a bit tender where that bottle had broke on my head. But nothin' to worry about.

Well, we did a bit of doctoring; then Zulu Tom said:

"You're not broke, Baas Yank. All the other things can be taken care of. I'll find a way. An' I'll still be in your debt."

He was referrin' to a little help I gave him once. Hell, it didn't amount to nothin'. But Zulu Tom would have it I'd saved his life. Maybe I did, at that. It's a fact his back was turned to the fellow who was gettin' set to knife him.

'Course, I hadn't meant to tell Zulu Tom all my troubles. I'd only gone to his place for a night's hide-up. I meant to leave the two greenies in his care an' make my way out of the mess. But havin' blurted my piece, I decided to stick to it, so I just said—

"It's white of you to help me, Tom."

He laughed at that—always did when anybody called him white. But he knew I meant it for a compliment.

He said gravely—

"I think these two gentlemen ought to talk."

Well, them two started to jabber at each other in French. But Zulu Tom interrupts.

"I speak French, gentlemen," he said, "an' also, thus savin' you additional embarrassment, German, Spanish, an' Latin. My Greek, I'm sorry to say, is a little rusty. Perhaps you will discuss your secrets in that language."

They stared at him as if they was struck dumb, an' I laughed to myself. I reckoned Zulu Tom was throwin' a bluff at them. But he wasn't, for, next thing I knew, them three was talkin' in a language that *was* Greek to me.

Zulu Tom turned to me with a smile of apology.

"They tested my knowledge, Baas

Yank," he said. "They also want to know if you can be trusted. I told them, but in the language of gentlemen an' scholars—" they squirmed at his bit of sarcasm— "that you were a square shootin' son of a gun."

Zulu Tom was like that. But I mustn't talk any more about him, or you won't hear the yarn I want to tell you. But in your mind write down that Zulu Tom was one of these Galahads. Without fear an' without reproach—one of them fellers.

I grunted an' waited. I reckoned it was the turn for one of them fellers to speak.

"I think we ought to introduce ourselves," said the feller who'd been handling the chair back at Taffy's. He was a slim, earnest looking chap with a nose like an eagle's beak. "My name's Jack Smith an' this is Dicky Jones."

I knew they were aliases.

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure," says I. "An' my name's Robinson. That makes us three of a kind, if you know what I mean."

Whether they did or not's no matter. But I was Robinson to them all the time we was together. An' they was Smith an' Jones to me. That was the only time I sailed under a false name—not that names matter.

"We've decided to tell you our story," Smith goes on. "Perhaps you can help us."

"But can't we have a drink?" Jones says, lickin' his lips. "I'm damned dry."

Smith mildly objected.

"You've had enough, Dicky," he said.

But Jones scowled.

"I'm thirsty, I tell you," he grumbled.

Me—I didn't say anything. An' Zulu Tom didn't neither. He only cocked a knowin' eye at me an' got out a bottle an' glasses which he set on a table near Jones. An' Jones didn't seem to be interested in anything else from then on, save that he grunted a yes or a no whenever his chum appealed to him to back up some point in the story he told us.

And what a story!

THEY was on the track of buried treasure. It all had to do with a Portuguese treasure ship that was wrecked hundreds of years ago—when Portugal was a nation that counted—on the East Coast. Accordin' to their yarn, there was a ton or two of church jewels on board which the Jesuit priests managed to get ashore.

An' then there was a lot about the overland trek made by the survivors of that wreck. How most of 'em were killed off by savages an' the rest—all but one, that is—died of fever, or got lost, or was eaten by lions. Anyway all but one died. An' the one who lived he hid the jewels but, bein' a bit of a renegade, he didn't tell anybody. He planned to go back for 'em, but he was sent to India an' he never got a chance to return to Africa.

He wrote all about the treasure in his diary which he hid away. An' that diary came into the hands of these two fellows—never mind how. They sold all they had, an' borrowed money, an' on the strength of a crazy yarn written by a crazy dago two or three hundred years ago, came to Africa treasure huntin'.

I laughed at the poor fool. The fact they had the old geezer's maps an' diary with 'em didn't mean anything to me.

"You go back where you came from," I said. "You're more likely to get rich sellin' pink pills an' red tape than huntin' treasure." I meant to tell you that one was studyin' to be a doctor an' the other a lawyer, back in England. An' they'd been friends ever since school days.

Zulu Tom said quietly—

"Butcher Hines an' his crowd didn't laugh, Baas Yank."

That sobered me. Butcher was nobody's fool.

"How did you get in with that bunch?" I asked.

"A man Jones met on the boat advised us to go to him," Smith said.

"I'll bet you his name was Sam Hardy," I said.

That opened Smith's eyes.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

How did I know? Sam Hardy being the

slickest card sharp who ever worked the mail boats. I told him that.

Smith sighed an' looked sort of reproachfully at Jones.

"Go on," that feller grumbled. "Say 'I told you so.' Show me up for a fool."

Smith looked uncomfortable.

"Well, I did think he was a bit of a sharper, Dicky," he said.

"He was nothin' of the kind," Jones said like as if he was spoilin' for a fight. "He was a gen'man. An' I don't care a damn what anybody says."

An' he poured himself out another drink.

Smith tried to apologize for him.

"Dick's one of the best fellows in the world," he said. "Only he's a bit too trustin', an'—" he sighed—"he drinks, I'm afraid, more than's good for him."

"Never mind him," I says. "Get on with the story. How'd you come to get in with that crowd you was with at Taffy's place?"

Butcher, it seems, introduced them to four friends of his an' they adjourned to Taffy's to talk things over an' make plans for outfitting an expedition.

"But I got suspicious," Smith said, "almost as soon as we got in that dirty room. Butcher insisted on bein' allowed to keep our papers—the maps an' all that, you know. When I refused, the row started. One of the men stood up for us. Butcher stabbed him in the back. The rest you know."

That brought us back to where we was—in Zulu Tom's place.

"Wonder what Butcher's game was?" I said.

"You don't believe in the treasure, Baas Yank?" he asked.

"Hell, no! Do you?"

He whistled thoughtfully.

"Why not?" he asked presently. "It's true that many Portuguese treasure ships, homeward bound from India, were wrecked on this coast. In a number of cases the crews were able to get ashore in boats an' trekked overland to Mozambique. A lot died on the way. My people accounted for some of them. They killed white men in those days. That was before they were taught the benefits of Christianity. Rum, for example . . .

"There was the case of the *Santo Domingo*—"

An' he told us yarns about the old Portuguese adventurers which made tales of Henry Morgan read like "Golden Hours for Sunday School Scholars".

As Zulu Tom talked, I began to think there might be something in this treasure hunt of Smith an' Jones. You see, if what Zulu Tom said was true, there was times when these shipwrecked Doms managed to get their treasure on shore. But never did the survivors turn up with it at Mozambique. They always had a story to tell of how it had been taken from them by savages, or they'd had to discard it. Say, you could almost picture them strewing the ground with the gold an' precious stones they'd filched from the Indian nabobs.

"Yet," Zulu Tom said thoughtfully, "there is no trace of any jewels being found or stolen by my people."

That was funny, when you considered the sort of things that made up the treasure: jeweled rapiers, an' church ornaments, an' breastplates, an' golden, jewel inlaid armor. Hell! My mouth watered at hearing about the stuff which had been the cargo of the *Santo Domingo*.

"It's my belief," said Zulu Tom, "that within a hundred miles north an' south of Mozambique there are a number of treasure cargoes hidden—if only a man knew where to look. An' these gentlemen seem to know where to look for one."

THAT got me all excited, believe me. We went over their story again an' studied the funny old map this dead an' gone renegade Dom had drawn. An' even Jones sat up an' began to take an interest in things. He made some dirty cracks, too, about Smith being a fool to trust us. But we ignored that.

Zulu Tom had to explain the map to me—at first I couldn't make head or tail of it. It was covered with writin' an' pic-

tures of lions with human heads an' fool things like that.

It gave me a cold thrill, let me tell you, to realize, as I soon did, that it was a map of a district I knew as well as I knew the palm of my hand. Say, better than that. I knew the exact spot where it said on the map: "Here be the treasure." Only it said that in Latin.

I leant back in my chair an' listened to Zulu Tom an' the other two talkin' things over. No, I don't reckon I did much listenin'. I was playin' with the idea of ditchin' them two an' goin' after the treasure myself. But they got me on the hop, so to speak, when they turned to me an' Smith said—

"You'll come in with us, Mr. Robinson, won't you?"

"Well, as to that—" I began.

"We need you, Baas Yank," Zulu Tom interrupted.

"We?" I said, surprised. "Are you in it, too?"

He nodded.

"We're forming a sort of company. These two gentlemen are willing to go on equal shares. They contribute the information—the map an' so forth. I contribute the funds to outfit the expedition in a proper manner; an' you, we hope, will be in charge. Obviously we need a man like you, who knows the country. These two gentlemen would be helpless—as they are ready to admit—alone on such a trip. I cannot go. I have work to do here."

I nodded.

"Then you'll come with us!" Jones shouted excitedly; his face was flushed an' his speech thick.

"Yes," I said. Then I added—

"When we get to this place we'll find it as crowded as a health resort in season—an' it won't be healthy for any of us. How many folk have you told about this treasure besides Sam Hardy an' Butcher an' his thugs?"

"We told some friends about it at home. We had to find some one to finance us. But we swore them to secrecy first," Smith said, kind of lamely.

I laughed.

"I suppose you swore Hardy an' Butcher to secrecy, too?"

"At least we didn't show them the maps," Jones said sullenly.

"That's something," I admitted. "But not much. They'll follow us an'—"

"That's why you've got to go, Baas Yank," Zulu Tom said. "You can throw them off your trail. You've got a reputation—"

Then I thought of another thing.

"How we going to outfit? How are we going to get out of the *dorp?* By this time I'm willin' to gamble every lousy dago policeman in the place is on the lookout for us. You can bet Taffy Evans has told 'em a pretty tale about the affair tonight. An' Butcher's friends'll be on the lookout for us. We'll be lucky if we can get out of the town with our skins whole. It's a fact we won't be able to do it with all the carriers an' trek gear we'll need on this expedition. You two, being new, will need a hell of a lot of stuff—"

"We're not soft," Smith said confidently. "We're in good condition an' ready to face any hardships you can face."

"Sam Hardy told me all about the hardships of trekking," Jones said with a leer. "Plenty of women an' he said they make good beer—"

"I ain't interested in hearin' what Hardy told you," I said, sharp-like. "But you can look for none of them things if you trek with me. Better understand that now."

"Of course," Smith put in hastily. "Dicky was only jokin'. An' we're not soft. We're fit for anything."

The poor fool, in his earnestness, seemed to think that trekkin' in Africa made no bigger call on a man's stamina than cricket. I felt sorry for him; an' I liked him for the way he stood up for his pal.

"Fish don't fly," Zulu Tom said easily. "An' you don't know Africa. No; Baas Yank is right. Two or three weeks on the veld, traveling the way he travels, would kill you. You must have proper equipment.

"Suppose, Baas Yank," he said to me,

"we figure out just what you need."

We did that. Hell, we drew up a list as long as your arm. I could, right now, trek in comfort from the Cape to Broken Hills with half the equipment Zulu Tom insisted was necessary for an expedition a couple of hundred miles north of Lourenço Marques!

"That's goin' to cost a pretty penny, Tom," I said.

"I'll get it back," he replied. "An,' if I don't, I'll still be in your debt."

There was a lot more talking at Zulu Tom's place.

An' we had skoff an' talked some more, then Zulu Tom sent us to bed. An' the next thing I knew Tom was standin' by my bed an' it was early mornin' . . .

NOW I THINK of it, our getaway from Lourenço Marques is a story of itself; an' our trek to the Lion Mountain'd make a good book length yarn. But it ain't my intention to go into a maze of unnecessary details.

We left the *dorp* within the hour of my getting up. Tom rigged me up like an Arab—not that I'd have fooled the genuine article, but it was a good enough disguise for our purpose. An' Smith an' Jones—they was dressed like Arab women. Heavily veiled, an' all that, an' riding on donkeys.

We had sixty niggers in our *safari*—all carrying loads. Trade stuff, if anybody got inquisitive. No one did. The whole business was damned plausible. We passed right by Taffy's place an' Taffy an' his gang crowded out to see us.

We headed north, right in the direction of our destination. That was Zulu Tom's instructions. I'd figured to make a bluff at traveling south an' then circling round.

"But no," Tom said. "If any one follows you—an Taffy's sure to put some one on the trail of a *safari* of the size you're going to lead—they'll suspect something's in the wind right away if you play any tricks like that. No; go openly. That's the best way to avoid suspicion."

I guess he was right. But, at that, we had our followers. They helped to make the trekkin' excitin'—until we got rid of 'em. It took us three days to do that.

An' say, I wish you would have seen the stuff Zulu Tom had put into that outfit. Tents an' mosquito nets, water filters an' heaven knows what all. For once in my life I traveled the veld in style. Smith an' Jones could never have lived through the trip without them things.

They was green. They didn't even know enough to keep their helmets on in the sun. An' the going was rough, after the first four or five days. Swamps an' thorn bush an' a two day trek over a desert of lava rocks where there was no water, no life—only utter damnation.

Them two fellows had about everything goin'. Fever, veld sores, dysentery. One got a touch of bush blindness; the other—he was interested in bugs of one sort or another—discovered the business end of a scorpion. His arm swelled up as big as his body.

I'm tellin' you I had to dry nurse them two an', naturally, we was delayed considerable what with one thing and another.

Jones gave me the most trouble, apart from sickness an' gettin' lost an' all that. I had to watch him close any time we was near a *kraal*, else he'd be sneakin' away. An' he was too blamed friendly with the carriers. Told me he was tryin' to learn the language—an' he did make some progress, havin', it seems, a natural gift that way. Well, that'd have been all right, but a nigger ain't a dog. You can't pet him one minute an' boot him the next an' expect to keep his respect. That was the way Jones treated 'em. Still an' all, I could manage him without much fuss. You see I was boss of the outfit. An' I was that. What I said went.

I had my first little run-in with him as soon as he got over his dose of fever. He'd talked things in his delirium that I wanted to check. As a rule it don't pay to put much stock in fever talk. But Jones, it was plain he begrudged sharin' the treasure with anybody. The fool plans he hatched in his fever brain to do me an'

Zulu Tom out of our share! An' when I went for him he wanted me to join him an' Smith to do Zulu Tom out of it. In cold blood he suggested that. 'Course, I laughed at him. He was too small stuff to get really mad about. A comedy villain, I put him down as, if you understand what I mean. His chum, Smith, was pretty sore with him—I knew that. But, just the same, he made excuses for him to me. Lookin' back over it all now, I get to wonderin' how them two could remain friends. But that's an endless trail to get on. It ain't easy—often it ain't possible—to figure out the way of friendships.

LION MOUNTAIN—that was the place where the treasure was accordin' to that dead an' gone dago. An' a month after leavin' the *dorp*, we camped two or three miles from its base.

It was a bit of paradise, if you like. A small green valley with a river ripplin' through—the sort of river you'd expect to find trout in. Only there wasn't. A low range of hills ran along one side of that valley an' the one in the center of the range was the tallest—but no stretchin' of the imagination could make it a mountain. Hell, it wasn't much more than a hillock. An' it was, if you was at all given to fancy, shaped somethin' like a crouchin' lion.

At that, though, I don't reckon it was called Lion Mountain because of its shape; more likely, I'm thinkin', because it seemed to be a sort of rendezvous for lions. I can't remember a time when I've visited that valley that I haven't shot at least one of the blamed lousy cats on that hill. I figure that because it's honeycombed with caves an' more or less inaccessible to humans—that valley is surrounded by buffalo swamps—it makes a good place for a lioness to lay up and whelp.

I slept late next mornin'. The sun was way up by the time I'd had a wash down at the river an' dressed. I supervised the niggers makin' skoff then went to my partners' tent, figurin' they'd be as keen as myself to make an early start treasure huntin'.

They was a damned sight keener, I found. They wasn't in their tent. Them two fellers had got the genuine treasure fever—mine was sort of diluted with a feelin' that there wasn't any treasure—an' they'd gone off, stolen a march on me, before sun-up.

It's easy enough for a greenhorn to lose himself on the open veld, an' it's a blamed sight easier amongst the hills. A man can get turned about quicker. I reckoned I'd be hearing signal shots 'fore long an' I'd have to go out lookin' for them two.

I hoped they wouldn't go foolin' around explorin' caves an' findin' the owners at home. Then I hoped they would, so that I could collar all the treasure for myself. But it didn't take me long to snap out of that. I sat down to my skoff feelin' damned ashamed of myself.

After I finished eatin' I gave the niggers plenty of work to do fixin' up the camp, then I took my bearin's an' set off for the spot where it said on the map, "Here be the treasure".

I got a good memory where maps are concerned. An' I had seen that one Lord knows how many times. We'd pored over it night after night. Reckon I knew every spidery ink scratch on it. I could, knowin' that valley like I did, have walked blindfold to where the treasure was supposed to be.

Halfway up Lion Mountain it was. A big boulder in the middle of a level, plateau-like bit of ground covered up—the old Dom wrote on his map—a shallow gully. An' in that gully was the treasure.

I knew that boulder. I'd sat in its shade more than once.

I said that valley was a small one, but it wasn't so narrow that a man could spit across it. An' the river—it took some careful crossin' if a man wanted to avoid a duckin'. The current was swift, the boulders slippery. I reckoned both my partners must have got a duckin' in the

crossin'. An' that made me hot. Foolin' around in wet clothes is another way of committin' suicide, to my way of thinkin'.

What I'm gettin' at is that it took me some considerable time to get to the foot of Lion Mountain, an' most of the time I was trekkin' right out of sight of it, pushin' through bush or swimmin' through head high elephant grass. Sure, I said swimmin' through an' I meant that. It's the safest an' easiest way to go through elephant grass; usin' the breast stroke, you understand.

Just after crossin' the river I happened on the spoor of my two partners. They'd got their duckin', all right. I could see where they'd stood wringin' the water out of their clothes.

I followed their spoor for a bit until I got nearly dizzy followin' their damn fool twistin' an' turnin's. They didn't know whether they was comin' or goin' half the time I'm thinkin'. An' I'll admit to bein' surprised when I came out on to the open, risin' ground, at the foot of Lion Mountain, to find they'd been there before me. I'd pictured them still wanderin' about in the maze of elephant grass.

JUST as I was about to start to clamber up the steep slope to the rock I heard a revolver shot an' knew one of my partners was firin' off his toy popgun.

I listened, expectin' to hear shouts. But not a sound. I looked up the hill—an' could see nothin'. I was too close to the rise. I couldn't even see the big rock.

Maybe I wondered vaguely what the pistol shot meant, but I didn't give it much thought. The treasure fever had got me again an' I began to clamber up that hill like a *klipspringer*.

A regular fusillade of shots brought me to a halt. There was a pause, then another lot—rifle shots this time. An' I heard Jones shoutin' an' callin' like as if he'd gone mad!

I grinned.

"Reckon he's lost himself," I said. "Or ," I added, "he's found the treasure."

And I covered the rest of that climb to the plateau like a champion roundin' off a hundred yard dash.

I found Jones, caperin' about, shoutin' an' laughin'. He didn't sober none when I got to him; he could only point an' gurgle, he was so excited.

Good reason, too. He had shifted that boulder I was tellin' you about. He'd used his rifle an' a tent pole, they'd taken along, as levers. He'd ruined a good rifle —but who was goin' to bother about a rifle.

There *was* a gully under that boulder. An' in that gully—I was down on my hands and knees pretty quick, feelin' about among the rubbish which had accumulated there durin' the passin' of centuries.

Why drag it out? The treasure was there!

Jeweled crucifixes, gold, rubies, sapphires—a king's ransom, believe me.

Jones got down on his knees beside me an' we fished round there in the débris like two kids atone of those lucky dip tubs.

I remember noticin' Jones' fingers were heavy with jewelry. One of the rings was set with a ruby—as big as a pigeon's egg it looked. An', man, I wanted that ring.

"An' who the hell," I said, "gave you the right to grab all the best stuff for yourself?"

We stared at each other like a couple of starved curs snarlin' over a bone. But I got a sense of humor. It's a good thing to have, I've found. It keeps a man sane.

So I got to my feet an' began to laugh. You see it was so damned foolish us gettin' ready to go for each other over one lousy ring when there was jewels enough to make us all rich for life.

Jones got to his feet too. I noticed he'd got a funny look in his eyes. I put it down to fear. An' he slowly stripped the rings off his fingers, addin' them to the pile of stuff on the ground.

"Of course," he said slowly, "we'll divide up squarely between us. I shouldn't have put the rings on. I'm afraid I went mad for a little while. This treasure—"

He passed his hand slowly over his eyes.

I understood what he meant. Didn't the sight of that treasure come near to gettin' me the same way?

"That's all right," I told him.

We began to dance about an' yell. I drew my revolver an' emptied it into the air. Then I emptied the magazine of my rifle. An' that was a damned foolish thing to do, having in mind the reputation of Lion Mountain. Suddenly I was conscious that I was dancing a fandango all by myself. Jones was back at the hole again. I saw that he'd got that ruby ring on his finger again.

Mad? I was madder than a hornet. But before I could do or say anything, another thought came to me.

"Where's Smith?" I asked.

Jones straightened up an' stared at me —looked at me like as if he hadn't heard aright what I'd said.

He got to his feet an' looked around in a sort of puzzled manner.

"Smith?" he says. "Why I've been so damned excited about findin' the treasure that I'd forgotten all about him."

"Well, where is he?" I reckon I spoke sharply. I had a half idea that Jones was going mad.

"He went to look for something we could use to lever the boulder away. I managed to do it whilst he was gone. An' then I forgot all about him."

"It's funny," I said slowly, "that all our shootin' an' shoutin' didn't bring him back."

Jones came closer to me.

"Maybe he's lost," he said hoarsely, "or a lion got him. Or—"

Then his face lightened and he shouted, looking over my shoulder—

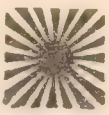
"Here he comes!"

Say, even as I turned I knew I oughtn't to have done so.

Next moment I was pivoting back again. There was a report an' I felt as if a battering ram had hit me in the belly. It doubled me up. But I was so damned mad—at myself for being so easily caught off guard an' at Jones for the dirty game he was playin'—that I tried to close with the dirty skunk.

Hell, I didn't have no chance, although there'd have been a different story to tell if my gun had been loaded. Like a fool I hadn't reloaded after firin' them "celebratin' shots". Jones sprang at me. I just caught a glimpse of his face—white an' ugly it looked.

Next moment he crashed the butt of his revolver down on my head. After that I didn't take any interest in things for quite a bit.



WHEN I woke up the sun was a good bit past noon. I was alone. Jones had gone. He'd taken the treasure—my guns—everything.

My head ached like as if it was goin' to bust. I put my hand up to it, scatterin' a swarm of flies, an' when I took it down again it was all sticky an' red. I tried to get to my feet, but my legs wouldn't hold me. I reckon I fainted, 'cause the next thing I knew Lion Mountain was in shadows. The sun was settin'.

I managed to get to my feet this time but couldn't stand erect. Couldn't think for a bit what ailed me until I remembered that blow in the belly.

Say, I nearly cried with relief when I found out what was the trouble. My belly was all one black an' yellow bruise. But the skin wasn't broken anywhere. See what had happened? The bullet from Jones' gun had hit my belt buckle. His revolver—didn't I tell you?—was a cheap Belgian one. Lucky for me. Now a bullet from my gun, fired at that range, an' hittin' where that one had hit, would have driven that buckle clear through to my backbone.

My head wound wasn't so much. As far as I could judge, there was no bones broken. An' the bruises wasn't nothin'. Damned painful, but I figured I'd get over that in a day or two.

I figured things might be worse, but not such a hell of a lot.

You see I didn't have any weapons. I knew I couldn't make the trip back to the camp before darkness set in, an' I couldn't see myself crawlin' through that

elephant grass on hands an' knees—I couldn't walk far, that was plain—in the dark. I had no grub, no water—nothin'.

Come to think of it I wouldn't have made a fire anyway. I figured Jones had left me for dead. If he saw a fire he'd be back after me an' I wasn't feelin' capable of playin' tag that night with a murderer.

What I did was climb up on to a big, flat topped boulder an' prayed like hell that there'd be no lions sniffin' around. It was dark before I'd got myself settled for sleep. It was blamed cold, and a heavy dew soaked me to the skin. I licked the rock, I remember; that satisfied my thirst some.

I did a lot of thinkin' that night. I cursed myself above a bit. I'd been way off in my estimation of Jones. A small time crook, I figured him. Reckoned he didn't have the guts for anythin' that mattered to any one but himself. But I was wrong, an' payin' hard for bein' wrong. Murder was in Jones' heart, I'm thinkin', before ever he came to Africa. Africa gave him the opportunity—that's all.

I wondered where he'd put Smith's body, for I was sure he'd done for him. An' rememberin' that first lone shot I'd heard, I figured that that shot had been Smith's death warrant. I thought of the things that ought to have put me wise. That story Jones told me, for instance, to explain Smith's absence. I ought to have known that it would have been hardly possible for him to shift that boulder himself. 'Course, he had Smith to help him, an' he did the killin' *after* they'd found the treasure.

Still, cursin' myself didn't help much so I figured ways of gettin' after Jones an' making the skunk pay for everything.

It was the sunrise that woke me. I felt as sore as if I'd been trampled on by a herd of elephants. I thought of the trek ahead of me an' pulled myself together. But before I left that Lion Mountain I scouted around a bit for Smith.

I found the poor devil's body in a bit of a ravine. He'd been chewed up some by hyenas, an' it would have been difficult to prove in a court of law what killed him. But me, I knew the back of his head had been blown away by a revolver bullet. I went through his rags of clothing an' found some letters. They didn't tell me much. But they did give me the right names of Smith an' Jones.

Well, I covered Smith with a pile of stones—damned slow work, let me tell you, feelin' the way I did—an' then I set off after Jones. I'd got to do it myself, you see. It wasn't one of them cases where you can report everythin' to the police an' let it go at that. We was in Africa, an' Portuguese territory. An', anyway, what could the police have done even if they'd been so minded to work on the case. There was no witnesses to the murder of Smith an', before they could have got to his body, nothin' to show how he died. I knew Jones'd have a good story to tell. It came down to my word against his an', my relations with the Portuguese bein' what they were, I knew they wouldn't believe me.

'Course Jones ought to have made sure he'd killed me. Maybe his nerve broke. Never mind; that don't matter. I'm only sayin' I meant to take care of Jones myself. But the dice were loaded against me. I'll say they were. No grub, no carriers, an' my body one big ache.

But I'd got a revolver—if it could be called such—an' ammunition. I got that from Smith, of course.

More important, even than that, I knew Africa. Jones didn't.

I ain't goin' to tell you the hell I went through on the trip back to where we'd made camp. You can imagine it. I felt better though, after I'd had a wash in the river.

At the camp I found plenty to interest me.

There'd been a bit of a fight, I gathered. The ground was trampled over, an' behind some bushes were two dead niggers. One shot, the other stabbed with an *assegai*.

An', the spoor told me, the carriers had separated. One lot goin' the way we'd come, the other heading northeast. I

didn't need to see the footprints of Jones' boots to know which lot he'd gone with. Naturally, he wasn't goin' back to Lourenço Marques. He wasn't goin' to chance runnin' into Zulu Tom or any of Taffy Evan's crowd.

Well, I set out after him. Givin' no thought to the fact he had a day's start almost—what's a day in Africa?—or to my bruises or hunger. The thought of vengeance was a healing ointment to my wounds, food to my belly an' speed to my legs.

IT'S NOTHING to my credit—a matter of self-protection, that's all—but I've played fair with niggers all my life. There's some few, scattered here an' there about this blamed continent, who reckon they owe a debt of gratitude to me.

Now there was an old headman of a *kraal* not more than a three days' trek from Lion Mountain who would have it that there was a debt of gratitude owin' me, an' all that headman's folk accepted the debt. A damn good job for me. I heard all about it afterwards—after a week or more ravin' with the delirium of fever.

His hunters found me crawlin' on hands an' knees through a buffalo swamp. I was as naked as a new born baby, an' plastered from head to foot with black mud. Lord knows how long I'd been that way—but I was as mad, I gathered, as a March hare.

Well, them hunters tied my hands an' feet to a pole an' carried me to their *kraal*. Their medicine men cured me. I hate to think of the filthy concoctions they must have given me to drink—but they cured me.

When I found I could use my legs again an' insisted on trekkin', the old headman furnished me with grub an' carriers. Hell! They *carried* me in a hammock!

I was feelin' pretty low in my mind, let me tell you. I could only guess how long I'd been laid up. Long enough, I figured, for Jones to have got clear of the country an' my vengeance.

I sort of dozed through the first three days of that trek an' didn't pay much attention to the sort of country we was passin' through, or to what the niggers told me. It all came back later, though.

On the fourth day, when we'd finally left the swampy ground behind an' were on the high veld, I began to take an interest in things. Wouldn't let them carry me any longer. I was able from then on to trek with the best of 'em.

An' then one day, just toward the end of the afternoon trek, we came to a *kraal* built on the banks of a wide, flood swollen river. An' I knew that river. Even at the end of the dry season it ain't easy to cross.

As we neared a man scuttled out of one of the huts an' ran, head bent, down to the river. I say ran, but it was more like as if he hopped along. He carried a sack in his right hand. It bumped along the ground behind him.

When I saw he was a white man I became a bit more interested, but not until he had scrambled into a dugout an' paddled out into the current did my brain really work.

An' then I ran like hell, my carriers after me, an' the people from the *kraal* swarming out behind them. That feller in the dugout was Jones. I didn't think of anything else.

I got to the river bank an' cursed—Lord how I cursed—because there wasn't another dugout in sight; an' because I didn't have a gun.

I snatched an *assegai* from a nigger an' threw it, but it fell short—damned short. I yelled at him. I told him to come back. But he didn't stop paddlin'. He dug into the water like as if a devil was after him.

I would have gone in after him, but my carriers held me back. Reckon I was foamin' at the mouth. I fought to get away from 'em, but they held me fast. An' when I calmed down a bit they showed me why they wouldn't let me go. An' I was satisfied. I wasn't so crazy that I wanted to do a mixed bathin' act with a lot of crocs. An' the river was lousy with them.

So I squatted down on the bank, watchin' Jones, tellin' myself I'd be able to get after him in the mornin'—the *kraal* niggers said they could get hold of another dugout for me by then—an' listenin' to the tale of how Jones happened to be at that *kraal* instead of bein' well out of the country like I'd supposed.

He'd come there all alone about the same time I'd been picked up in the buffalo swamps. He told them his carriers had deserted, takin' all his stuff—rifles, ammunition an' everthing. He didn't have a thing, the niggers said, except something in a big bag that he wouldn't let any one see. He used that bag for a pillow at night, the niggers said; he never let it go out of his hand in the daytime. They thought it was some big charm medicine.

An' he was limpin', could hardly walk, they said.

Say, his feet were in a hell of a state. The jiggers had been at work an' it's a wonder he was able to walk at all. Them niggers at the *kraal* was a hospitable crowd. Besides, Jones promised them all sorts of rewards. So they took care of him. Took care of his feet an' gave him the keys of the city. What I mean, they supplied him with everything their idea of hospitality calls for. Which includes plenty of beer an' a woman.

HE FELL for both. He fitted in to the *kraal* life as if he'd been born to it. I'm sayin' that he was. He might have left two or three days before I appeared on the scene. He preferred to stay.

Then I began to think I'd have been a damned sight wiser if I'd left my vengeance to Africa. My comin' on the scene had only shocked Jones into runnin' away from the fate that was snarin' him.

I ain't sure how it happened. Yet, seein' that he was a greenhorn an' nigger dugouts ain't what you'd call handy craft, it was a thing that I might have expected to happen. Anyway, a cross-current swung that dugout round like a top an' Jones' clumsy efforts to check it tipped it over, spillin' him an' the sack into the water.

The sack sank, naturally. Jones floated—he was a strong swimmer. He struck out for the opposite bank, but the current swept him back to us.

He fought against it until he saw he wasn't swimmin' alone—there was crocodiles all around him. It looked, I'm tellin' you, as if the crocs were shepherdin' him toward us.

It's funny about crocs. I know places where it's death for a nigger to put one foot in the water but a white man can float on the surface an' fool around all day. An' I know a place where the opposite is true.

I'm tellin' you that is so, so you can believe me when I tell you not one of them crocs made a rush at Jones. They were only muzzlin' around him sort of inquisitive-like. He swam like a madman. He yelled; he beat the water to a foam. We could see stark ravin' fear in his eyes as he neared the bank.

Some of the *kraal* niggers—they'd heard my story—said he was so evil that the spirits of the river—the crocs, you understand—repudiated him. But I knew the crocs were bringin' him back to the fate he'd tried to escape.

He was sobbin' like a kid when he got to shallow water an' stumbled up the bank. A woman went up to him, touched him on the hand an' led him away.

An' I let him go—rightly or wrongly, I let him go. He'd murdered his best friend; he tried to murder me. He was rotten. But I let him go. You see, youngster, I reckoned he was already beginnin' to pay. His end, I'm saying, was written on his face. He was earmarked for a white kaffir if ever a man was. He'd only tried to run away from that *kraal* because he was afraid of me. My comin' on the scene nearly forced him to escape his fate. But I don't know. There was *kraals* on the other side of the river. He'd have holed up in one of them, I'm thinkin', if he'd got across. He'd tasted *kraal* life, an' it

suited him. It was like a drug habit: an' he didn't want to break it.

Yep, I let him go to his *kraal* hut an' his nigger woman. She was deservin' of a better fate. She looked after him, maybe she loved him, in her way. But her way pushed him deep an' deeper in the mud... It'd have been kinder, wouldn't it, if I'd killed him that day when he came up all drippin' an' mud smeared from the river? But he wasn't deservin' of kindness.

The treasure? You bein' young *would* be more interested in that than the way fate works out her own system of justice. The treasure? Hell, knowing that river, I reckon them jewels was soon buried under the slime of her bed. In any case I wasn't doin' any divin' for 'em. Not with them crocodiles about.

At that I didn't go back to Zulu Tom empty handed. He got good returns for his investment. An' Smith's people shared too.

Them carrier niggers of mine showed me where there was a big patch of rubber plants. I got a concession to work it an' sold it to a wealthy syndicate for a big price. I lost my share— But never mind about that.

Consider this fellow Jones—or Wain, to give him his proper name. Consider what he was an' what he might have been; think of what he done, an' the price he paid. He's been a white kaffir for close on twenty years—an' now he's dying of D. T's.

So you see, Africa didn't make him what he is. He was always what you see him, deep inside. An' that other point: it's a fact that he'd probably have got clear away if it hadn't been for the jiggers.

The jiggers lamed him so's he couldn't travel. Elsewise, rememberin' his money hunger, he wouldn't have stopped at that *kraal* but gone straight on to the port an' shipped for home.

But the jiggers lamed him! An' the jiggers wouldn't have been here if that dago captain hadn't wrecked his boat an' spilled her cargo on the beach at Ambriz.

Looks almost, don't it, as if providence had it all worked out right from the beginning? It does to me.

Western Banking

By JOHN L. CONSIDINE

ONE MORNING during the wild boom times in Tonopah a bank cashier, arriving at his place of business a little before nine o'clock, found a miner sitting on the doorstep.

"You're up early, Mike," said the cashier.

"I been sitting here since daylight," rejoined the miner, following the cashier inside.

"Anything I can do for you?"

"Yep. I want the money I have here on deposit."

"What's that for?"

"Well, I don't just know, now. I may put it in an oyster can and plant it somewhere, or I may buck the tiger with it."

"You don't mean to hint that this bank isn't safe, do you?"

"No, nothing like that. But I been up all night watching the president of your bank losing $25,000 at roulette. I haven't gambled in a long time, but I like to, just the same, and I about made up my mind that if anybody's going to gamble with my money, that guy will be me."

Incidents like this were not rare in the frontier camps of the Far West, but there was a time in the history of larger Western cities when unusual things happened in banks.

The cashier of a St. Louis bank arrived one morning to find three weary eyed persons sitting on the steps, one of whom was clutching tightly a sealed package. They followed him into the bank.

"How can I accommodate you, gentlemen?" he inquired. "Do you wish to make a deposit?"

"No," answered the man with the package. "I want to make a borrow."

"What security? Government bonds?"

"Government nothing! I got something that knocks 7-30's clean over the ropes. You see, these gents and myself have been playing poker all night. I got a dead sure thing but they're trying to raise me out. I want $5,000 to see them with. See here—" And unsealing the package, he showed its contents to the dumbfounded cashier. "This," he pointed out, "is my hand. I'm letting you see it, but don't let them—" indicating his companions who were crowding in—"get their peepers on it. You see, we sealed it up so the cards couldn't be monkeyed with."

The cashier looked at the hand—four kings and an ace. (This was before the royal flush had invaded St. Louis, and the hand beat any other then recognized.)

The cashier's gaze was cold as he surveyed the cards.

"This bank, sir," he said with freezing austerity, as he returned the precious pasteboards, "does not lend on cards."

The disappointed applicant turned sadly away.

"Boys," he said, "I'm a chump if he ain't a-going to let me be frozed out on this hand."

But his eyes brightened almost immediately as he saw the president entering. An appeal was made to him. The banker, who had been spending the night at the poker table, comprehended the situation instantly. Rushing behind the counter, he seized several bags of twenty-dollar gold pieces and accompanied the gamesters to the room where they had been playing. In a short time he returned, threw down the amount of the loan, together with $500 interest on the accommodation, and glared at the cashier.

"Ever played poker?" he demanded.

"No," admitted the abashed cashier.

"Well, sir, if you had, you would be better able to recognize good collateral on sight. You may as well understand, once for all, that four kings, with an ace for a confidence card, is good in this institution for our entire assets!"

Continuing

DEATH IN TIGER VALLEY

By

REGINALD CAMPBELL

FROM behind a clump of bushes I heard a worrying snarl. The man eating tigress and her mate, grim monsters that had demoralized my Siamese teak valley, were at a ghastly meal. I forced my unwilling steps nearer, rifle ready, afraid to advance farther, afraid to flee.

What a fool I was for not waiting for Ralph Grainger, whose camp lay across the river some miles above mine! But since the Christmas polo meeting at Cha Kum, when Grainger had with apparent deliberation ridden me down, I rather mistrusted him. Months before, at the very first sign of the tigress in our valley, we had made a wager as to who would kill the unholy beast—and from that moment his keen rivalry had developed into an obsession. Another side of his nature, dark, callous, contemptuous, had revealed itself. And I knew, too, that his bitterness toward me was increased by the

fact that Mary Collins, the doctor's daughter at Cha Kum, had seemed to snub him for me—especially after Grainger had behaved so badly to every one at the Christmas meeting.

But at this moment, with the tigress and the tiger seventy-five yards away, I wished for the company of Ralph Grainger. Willingly would I have had him win the wager, shoot the tigress, and the tiger too. My own poor rifle was quite inadequate for two such murderous creatures. I could have sworn that I'd made not the slightest sound, yet as I stood there undecided, the snarling stopped and a great head came round the bushes. The tiger had shown himself.

I raised my rifle. Then with a coughing roar he charged. I did not see his body. I saw only the furious, ringed face getting bigger and bigger as he lapped up the ground in his stride. Seventy yards dwindled to sixty, sixty to forty . . .

I FIRED, but even as I squeezed the trigger a tiny patch of dry, brittle earth crumbled under the weight of my right foot. The consequent movement was infinitesimal, but quite enough, and even as my rifle roared I knew that I'd missed. I fired my second barrel, but wildly this time, for that slip of the foot had unnerved me, and then I went blind from stark terror.

Missed with both barrels, no time to reload, no hope of running away, no one following me up behind—death, sure and irrevocable, had come to me on that sunny April morning. I felt the tiger's hot, nauseating breath in my mouth, I felt his claws tearing my flesh, his teeth . . .

Then the darkness cleared. It was as if some invisible hand had swiftly drawn back a curtain, letting in the light and sun. Unharmed, I was staring at that open patch of ground before me, and not a single living creature was in sight.

The shock of relief started the sweat out of me; not ordinary beads of sweat, but torrents of it. I was not merely bathed in sweat, I was flooded in it. In an instant my clothes were wringing wet and my limbs as slippery as though dipped in oil. I dashed a hand across eyes and mouth and seemed to taste blood. I stared at my hand, but saw only those rivulets of brightly glistening sweat. I reloaded my rifle, and then with desperate courage walked right up to the clump and peered behind it.

Not a sign of either of the killers—but there lay what had only a few hours before been a living, breathing man. I averted my head and peered anxiously into the deeper forest beyond. Where were the killers now?

I forced my brain to reason. I'd just had a marvelous escape from death. Why? Because the tiger, unused to rifle fire, had been scared by the crashing echoes of my rifle and had stopped his charge halfway. As for the tigress, who knew what a rifle meant, she'd probably slunk off from the kill directly I'd arrived on the scene. The chances were, therefore, that her mate had joined her now and that they were both watching me from somewhere within the tangle of scrub in the thicker forest.

I could do nothing more without Grainger, and must return at once to the bungalow if I valued my life at all. I began walking backward toward the path by the river eighty yards behind me.

Once on the path my courage broke down again and I ran as if all the devils in hell were on my track. The little shanties of the village of Hwe Tark rose up before me, and I slowed down to a walk. I felt rather than saw the inhabitants looking at me curiously, furtively, but I took no notice of them; I hastened through the marketplace and into my compound beyond. I climbed up the bungalow steps and collapsed into a chair.

What was that? My boy was asking whether I wanted breakfast served. I nodded and the meal was brought. I could not touch it; I gulped down a cup of coffee, pushed away the food, then leaned over the veranda railings. Grainger's forest opposite seemed to reel and sway.

A galloping of hoofs, and Grainger himself flashed into the compound on the gray mare. He dismounted and took the steps in one stride. I turned to him.

"Man," he cried. "You look like death."

"I've seen death," I said, and a fit of nausea took me.

Vaguely I heard Grainger giving directions to my boy, and presently a tumbler was handed to me. It contained milk, egg and brandy, beaten up together, which I drank. The mists dissolved in my brain and I stood upright on my feet.

"I'm sorry," I said to Grainger. "Came near to making a damned fool of myself."

"H'm," said Grainger. "Better take a breather for a minute or two before getting down to business."

I did as he told me, and rested with my head on my arms. I'd often seen death before, and twice at the claws of this particular tigress; but Grainger had been with me when we'd viewed those other two bodies, and no snarling horror had come charging upon me then. If I wanted to do any more stalking in future I'd wait until after breakfast, I decided; an empty stomach is likely to turn.

I raised my head.

"Pass me a cigaret," I said, "and you'll hear what's happened."

Soothed by the wholesome smell of tobacco, I told him the story calmly and lucidly. When I'd finished I saw his knuckles whiten as he gripped the arms of his chair:

"But why the devil didn't you wait for me to come with you?" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't have missed that show for worlds, and between us we'd have bagged at least one of the brutes."

"How was I to know you were going to arrive so early?" I countered. "Where were you, by the way?"

"Three miles upriver, measuring timber. Camped there only last night. Didn't your coolies know that?"

"They may have. But in any case precious time would have been wasted before you could get here," I answered hotly.

"All right," he soothed. "We'll let that pass. And now for the next move. You say that the jungle's fairly open all round the spot where the man was killed?"

I nodded.

"Good." He clutched the rifle he'd brought with him and rose to his feet. "I'm going out after 'em right now."

"Not so fast," I cautioned him. "I'm coming with you."

He looked at me dubiously.

"You fit enough?" he asked.

Fit enough? Of course I was fit enough! What did he mean by that remark? A gust of anger seized me and I sprang up. Though I didn't realize it, my nerves were still badly tattered and I was ready to take offense at anything.

"What's behind that remark of yours?" I flared at him.

For answer he shouted to my boy to bring me another eggnog, and when that had gone the way of the first I saw that I'd been behaving like an overwrought schoolboy.

"Thanks," I said to Grainger. "Comes of not having breakfast. Ready?"

He nodded, and together we set out on the track of the tigers. It was ten in the morning by the time we reached the tragic remains behind the bushes, and Grainger at once set about a careful inspection of the ground all round them.

"Seems they've gone into deeper forest," he whispered. "But even that looks pretty open now that the hot weather's burned away the undergrowth. We'd better beat through it on foot."

"Hopeless," I told him. "Not one chance in a million of coming across 'em."

"Listen, man—"

He explained his idea. We were to separate at once, I going to the left and he to the right. Both of us were then to describe a gradual half circle, working inland from the river all the time, and when we'd completed our respective segments we were to cut back to my bungalow whether we met in the end or not. If we did meet so much the better; we'd know a complete circle had been described.

"I don't like it," I said, as I turned over the plan in my mind.

"Afraid to go alone?"

This time I wasn't mistaken; for an undoubted sneer lay under the words. Now that I was myself again, so was Grainger. His thoughtfulness in my bungalow this morning might have come from a different man.

"Yes," I said shortly, "I *am* afraid."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Then we'll have to go together. Means we've got double the ground to cover, that's all."

"And double the chances of success if we come across the killers," I broke in. "You said the same thing yourself earlier this morning."

"Shut up, and let's get on," he snapped.

Starting from the left, we began our circular beat through the forest which would eventually bring us back to the river. Though thousands of trees were everywhere, they provided scant shade, for their leaves had long ago been withered and struck down by the merciless sun. The iron hard ground pierced through the soles of our boots and blistered our tender feet; huge clumps of bamboo, drooping earthward, formed constant obstructions in our path.

That day was the hottest I ever remember. The sky was not blue; it was a hard, brassy glare, devoid of any master color. In it the sun resembled more its real self than the round, white orb to which we are accustomed. As we toiled up and down the scarred hills our very breath seemed to dance in the quivering air.

We had started at ten. By two o'clock in the afternoon we reckoned that we'd completed half the circle, but as yet we'd found no trace of the animals we were after. We toiled on, however, relieving our thirst by occasional drinks at lukewarm jungle pools, but at three o'clock an incident occurred that rendered further search out of the question. I trod upon a bear.

We were fighting our way over a tangle of dead bamboo stems, when a bomb exploded right under my feet, the bamboos rose with a jerk, and I was thrown heavily on my back. I picked myself up quickly, to behold a huge, black-brown bear bolting away from us as fast as his ungainly legs would carry him. The noise he made in his flight was terrific. Bellowing and howling, he crashed through obstacles in an ecstasy of terror; a stampeding herd of elephants couldn't have made a bigger uproar, and I swore heartily, for every wild animal for miles around would have been warned of some unusual presence.

Red with vexation, I turned to Grainger.

"Finish," I said significantly. "Better make for the river and then home. Question is, where is the river now?"

"Don't you know, man?" he asked irritably.

I glanced at the sky, then at the monotonous outlines of the hills all round us. One part of the jungle is very much like another, unless you're in a clearly defined teak, bamboo or evergreen belt, but here the jungle seemed composed of all three varieties.

"Should be over there, I think." I pointed to the south.

"Think?" he echoed. "You should know. It's your forest. Get on."

WE VERY nearly had to make a night of it out in the jungle. I had the deuce of a task in finding the right way back, but at last the welcome gleam of the river showed ahead and half an hour later we were in my bungalow.

Hot as the forest had been, the bungalow glowed like an oven as we entered it. We flung ourselves into long cane chairs in the coolest spot we could find. I shouted to the boy to prepare cold baths for us both before serving dinner, then I lay in a doze with my eyes half closed.

I was aroused by Grainger's voice.

"Can't we have a drink while the boy gets the baths ready?" he was saying.

I wearily heaved myself off the chair and crossed over to the sideboard, on which stood a decanter of whisky and a

porous earthenware jar containing cool water. I'd scarcely begun to pour out the drinks, however, when Grainger was by my side; tearing the decanter from my grasp, he flooded one tumbler with whisky and water, gulped down the contents, then banged the empty glass down on the sideboard.

"That slowness of yours'll be the death of me one day," he snapped. "Man, you make my nerves shriek at times."

I know it was silly of me; I know I should have let the remark pass by, and in an hour or two we'd have been ourselves. But what with the heat and the trials of the day I was nearly as rattled as he was. I glared at him through the lamplit darkness, and the air between us was a solid wall of heat.

"If you're going to stay the night in my bungalow," I said, for so it had been arranged, "you'll kindly learn manners first."

"You, of all people, to talk of manners." He made two strides across the room, then turned. "And you can't even keep a promise," he added viciously.

"A promise?" I repeated in amazement.

"Yes. Forgotten the arrangement we made when you were last in my bungalow?"

So that was what he was driving at! He actually considered I was taking a mean advantage over him in the matter of the bet because I'd gone out after the tigers at once instead of waiting for him to arrive. I took a pace toward him.

"Been brooding over that all day, I suppose. Hadn't you the guts to mention it this morning?"

His teeth flashed in a sneer.

"*I* had the guts right enough," he said meaningly.

I remembered the sorry figure I had cut shortly after his arrival, but I put it quickly from my mind. Grainger was asking for trouble, and he'd have it. I drew a deep breath, then let go.

By the time I'd finished there wasn't much he didn't know about himself. I told him my exact opinion of his conduct at leaving the villagers defenseless while I lay in hospital at Cha Kum, of what I thought of his furious riding that brought me into that hospital, and I added a few home truths concerning his character in general. I surprised even myself at what I found to say about him that night.

"Anything more to say?" he asked with ominous calm, when I had finished.

As I did not answer he stalked over to the veranda.

"If I stay one more minute in your bungalow, my friend, something unpleasant may happen," he snapped.

"It most undoubtedly will. For your own sake you'd better get out of here."

"One last word. In future you and I hunt on our own, but the bet still stands, mark you."

"It does," I agreed. "And the more so now. I'll raise you to a thousand ticals."

"I'll take you."

"Good. And now clear out."

His tall figure went down the steps into the compound. I saw the mare led out from my stables. She shone like a gray ghost in the starlit darkness. I went to the veranda railings and glowered down at the pair.

"You clod." Grainger's voice, low and mocking, floated up from below.

"Go to hell," I roared, and a moment later I was listening to the muffled beats of the mare's hoofs as he galloped her up the sandbars of the river toward his distant bungalow.

Alone, I imbibed an unusually stiff tot of whisky, then sat down in my bath and fairly simmered with rage. On looking back at the quarrel it seems utterly stupid and childish—a tremendous row starting over the absurd incident of my pouring out a drink too slowly. Yes, but at the back of beyond, far away from the distractions of civilization, trifles are apt to loom large as mountains and overshadow one's sense of proportion.

After a bath and dinner, I felt better and already regretted the scene. Both of us were equally to blame, so it seemed to me, but Grainger I knew would never admit himself at fault. It takes two to

make a quarrel, it also takes two to patch one up.

I gazed long into the sweltering night. Things were bad enough already with man eaters lurking near, but now they were worse. Grainger and I, contented before with light sparring bouts, had now become open enemies.

CHAPTER XIII

JUNGLE TOLL

FEAR had swept over the valley. Fear lurked behind every bush, waited at every pool, made every harmless sound a portent of frightful significance. Though the sun shone brilliantly, there was no real sunshine in the valley; fear had clouded it.

The end of May had come, yet still the hot weather was unrelieved by the longed for southwest monsoon. The forest, whitened by heat, towered grim and bare over the parched earth; the Mae Fah river and its side creeks, reduced to dazzling ribbons of shimmering sand and stones, flung back the glare to the brassy skies; and somewhere in that arid wilderness the tigress and her mate roamed free.

The killings had become more frequent. A man here, a woman there, taken by the man eaters from the scattered jungle villages that lay along the valley. No telling where the slayers next would strike, no knowing where they hid themselves, no traces left behind them save an ever growing number of hapless victims. And only Grainger or I to bring down vengeance upon them.

Sickness too was breaking out in the villages, especially among the inhabitants of Hwe Tark. The poor creatures lived now in a state of such constant terror that their vitality had sunk to an alarming degree, and should the scarcity of water cause an epidemic there seemed little hope for them. For water the villagers clung to the few remaining pools in the Mae Fah that lay directly opposite their huts; farther downstream they dare not venture for fear of the tigers. These pools served for everything; plough buffaloes wallowed in them, cattle muddied them, dogs and puppies frisked round their outskirts, yet from this tainted supply men, women and children drank freely.

In vain had I expostulated with the old headman of Hwe Tark. There were larger and cleaner pools only a few hundred yards below the village from which I myself obtained water while in headquarters. Why could not he do the same? All my pleadings were useless; not one man would venture beyond the limit of the village, and I was forced to give up trying to help them.

I endeavored to persuade my own coolies to carry up sufficient clean water for the immediate needs of the sick, only to meet with the same kind of reply. They were risking their lives quite enough in supplying me with the precious liquid, and they weren't prepared to make extra journeys downriver for the devil himself. Besides what was wrong with the water in front of the village? Did it not relieve the thirst when drunk? Thus had spoken my coolies, and there the matter had to rest.

As for rounding up the tigers, in the last few weeks I'd tried nearly every method possible, including bringing out a party of armed gendarmes from Cha Kum. Two days after a fisherman had been slain, I'd sent in a long report on the subject of the tigers to the Siamese authorities in the capital, and they had replied by sending out a sergeant and ten privates of the khaki clad gendarmerie. They arrived armed to the teeth and looking very ferocious, but a week of combing the jungle made changed men of them. They knew nothing of the jungle and its ways, and soon were in a worse state of funk if possible than the villagers they had come to help.

Finally one night they heard the killers calling to one another, and that about finished them. They informed me that important duties called them back to Cha Kum, and I saw them go with relief, for they'd been more of a hindrance to me than anything else.

THE GENDARMES had been gone three weeks and, alone as usual, I leaned over the veranda railings of my bungalow drinking in the cool of the evening. The last day of May had arrived, and I was thankful to see the month out, for June would bring the monsoon and with it a plentiful water supply. Grainger's forest opposite me was bare of a single leaf. Giant trees, thousands and thousands of them, stretched up bare arms to the heavens as if imploring rain, yet I still found beauty in the spectacle. Dry, burned out vegetation has a strange fascination, and soon I was under its spell.

I forgot Ralph Grainger, whom I had not seen since our quarrel; I forgot the killers, the heat, the manifold worries that haunted me, and sank into a happy dream in which the calm, sweet figure of Mary Collins floated like an angel of peace.

I was roused from my reverie by a jingling of bits, and turning, was surprised to see the sturdy form of old Trevor dismounting from his pony in my compound. I ran down to meet him, and we shook hands.

"A deuce of a long way here," he groaned, pulling an enormous handkerchief from his pocket and wiping his forehead. "Getting too old for this sort of thing. For heaven's sake, give us a drink, Foster."

I led him into the bungalow and soon had him comfortable. I thought the reason for his visit would be the periodical forest inspection upon which the Siamese Government sends its officers, but I was soon enlightened.

"This tiger business," said he. "Getting serious, isn't it?"

"Yes," I replied. "Very."

"Thought I'd come out and see if I could do anything. Trouble is, I'm not as young as I used to be. Found that out in the ride here today from Cha Kum."

"Rot, Trevor," I said. "You don't look a day over forty." And he didn't.

"H'm." Again the handkerchief was brought into use. "You might take me around tomorrow. Visit a few places where the brutes were last reported. Know what I mean?"

I nodded.

"Where's Grainger? Seen him of late?"

"No. Not for some time," I answered cautiously.

"Ha! Haven't you! Look here, Foster, what's all this about you two being at loggerheads?"

I started. Not a soul in Cha Kum or elsewhere could have heard of our quarrel, yet here was Trevor mentioning it as though it were common knowledge.

"Trevor," I said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Nonsense, man. No good trying to bluff me. Every teak-walla upcountry knows that you and Grainger have quarreled. Story is it's something to do with a bet on these man eaters. In the club at Cha Kum they talk of nothing else."

"Do they?" I returned. "Then they'd better mind their own business and leave Grainger and me alone."

"Quite; but the fact remains that you and Grainger seem to be making damned fools of yourselves."

"Has Grainger been croaking?" I asked hotly.

"Grainger? Not he. Nobody's seen or heard of him since he left Cha Kum after the meeting."

"Then how does every one know about our quarrel? I've told no one."

"So the yarn's true right enough?"

I was cornered.

"Yes," I said, "it is. But you haven't answered my question."

"How do they know? The very wind brings news in this country."

"Damn this country," I said heatedly.

He glanced at me narrowly.

"Time you came into Cha Kum and had a holiday, Foster. One or two of the teak-wallas happen to be in at the moment, and you'd get some tennis and bridge. Grainger had better come along too."

"If he wants to he can. I'm staying here. Good Lord, Trevor, haven't I

enough on my hands to *keep* me here?"

"Possibly, but—" he leaned forward and his kindly brown eyes searched my face. "Now I'll talk to you straight. I'm older than you, and I've seen what loneliness can do to a man. Four months ago you were John Foster, one of the few men among us, if you'll allow me to say so, whom the East hadn't changed. But now you're a different being."

"How's that?" I demanded.

"Not like you to glower and snap at me as if you wanted to bite my head off, is it?"

"I've done nothing of the sort."

"That's your trouble. You have, but you don't know it. You want a holiday at once, man."

"Trevor," I said calmly—very, very calmly—"you came out here to discuss the killers. Then let's get down to business and plan out a round trip together."

"Right," he said heartily, and for the rest of the evening we talked of that.

I couldn't help smiling, though, when he asked for quinine and aspirin on going to bed. He complained that the hot weather had awakened the fever in his bones, but I knew it was purely imagination, for he looked as fit as a fiddle. The East was getting *him*, not me.

THE ROUND trip I took with him lasted six days. We inspected all the likely localities that he thought might harbor the tigers, but not a sign of them was to be found and, as the sixth evening under canvas found us close to the cart road overlooking the valley, he decided to break off the search and ride back to his beloved Cha Kum.

"Can't ride as I used to," he grumbled. "Every time I swing a leg across a horse I get a twinge like a knife going right through my back."

"Better see Doctor Collins," I advised.

"Can't. He's been out a month now touring villages away to the north. Lot of sickness about this hot weather."

"Is Mary Collins out too?" A strange thrill went through me as I mentioned the name.

"She? No. Not this time. Looking after the hospital while he's away, and she's plenty to do, I can tell you. Cha Kum's full of cases. We'll be glad when—Damn, there went one of those twinges again. Give me a whisky."

I saw him off next morning as far as the cart road, then rode back to my bungalow. I would have laughed with amusement at the thought of grumbling old Trevor, had it not been for the tragic side. Ten years ago, when I had first arrived upcountry, the man was the finest polo player and big game shot in Siam, and what he didn't know of the jungle wasn't worth learning. Yet now, though fit outwardly, he was reduced to a crochety old gentleman full of imaginary ailments. He should go home at once, I reflected, before the East took a lasting hold of him.

We were nearing my bungalow now, Sunstar and I, and I drove my heels into his flanks. He responded with a full gallop, which I sat with perfect ease and confidence. Never, in fact, had I felt so strong and well before; and for Trevor to have said that I needed a holiday had been nothing less than sheer impertinence. I hummed a lively air as we swept down the treacherous path, but as we burst through the gates of my compound the song died in my heart and I pulled Sunstar to a standstill. As a sign of ill omen, a deputation of villagers awaited me.

I ran to the old headman.

"Yes?" I demanded. "What now?"

He read my thoughts, for he shook his gray head.

"Lord, it is not of the tigers we would speak to you, but of ourselves. Lord, we in the village wish to leave."

"To leave?" I repeated in astonishment. "Where for?"

"We know not, so long as we leave the valley. Would the great white lord take us somewhere?"

The very simplicity of the words shook the heart. I glanced at the dark brown faces all round me, and in the meek brown eyes raised to mine I saw child-like faith reflected. For children they were, helpless, hopeless children who had come to

me with a blind trust in my powers to transport them miraculously away from the hell in which they lived. I could not, I *must not* fail them.

"Is the sickness worse?" I asked gently.

"Lord—" the headman, tiny, wizened, pathetic, rolled from side to side on his haunches—"this last week, since you have been away in the forest with the other white master, every day the sickness has increased. Our cattle, too, grow thin and die, for we dare not let them graze too far from the village. We lack for both food and water, and the devils in the forest have made us faint at heart. Lord, if we leave not quickly, we die."

"Take me to the huts," I said, and I strode with him to the village.

What I saw there I do not like to remember. Tiny brown children, with thin, wasted bodies, stared at me with eyes that were bright with fever, and the touch of those hot little hands I still can feel. Young mothers, who a few weeks ago had been comely, bronze skinned women, lay in a dull stupor on the rush mats that served for couches, while even the menfolk had become ghosts of their former selves. Death indeed had cast his shadow over the palm fringed hamlet.

I made a hut to hut inspection, then with the help of my coolies distributed food and medicines from my storeroom among the worst cases in the village. As yet no epidemic had broken out, and the chief cause of the suffering appeared to be a kind of jungle fever brought on by undernourishment and fright; I therefore dosed the invalids with as much condensed milk, quinine and aspirin as I could spare, then returned to my bungalow to think out what had best be done.

Obviously the village had to be evacuated—and at once—for I had seen enough to know that the dreaded epidemic might break out at any moment. Yet to where could the inhabitants be taken?

Cha Kum was the obvious solution. The hospital was there for the sick, while the numerous empty bungalows of the teak-wallas would provide at least temporary shelter for those who were comparatively well. As for food, the Siamese and Laos in the capital were a kindly people who would not neglect to look after those worse off than themselves. But how to get the entire population of Hwe Tark over the twenty-two miles that separated them from Cha Kum?

It would be no good sending in to the capital for assistance. Dr. Collins was away and busy at other equally important work; while the Siamese authorities, kindly though they were, would waste vital time before taking any action. Where, they would ask themselves, were regulations to be found concerning the evacuation of jungle villages? They would probably wire to the Home Office in Bangkok for instructions, and before an answer came little children would be dying. No, I had to see this out on my own, though Grainger *might* be induced to help me.

I glanced at my watch. The time was half past two in the afternoon. Though I had not seen Grainger since our quarrel, my coolies were usually roughly aware of his movements, and at present I believed him to be in camp some four miles upriver. Summoning my fastest coolies, I sent him a note in which I explained the situation and begged him to put aside our own differences for the sake of these helpless people. Whether he would come or not remained to be seen; it depended entirely on the mood in which the note found him.

When the coolies had departed I summoned the village headman.

"Tomorrow at dawn," I told him, "we leave for Cha Kum."

"Tomorrow?"

The headman spread eloquent hands. That would be utterly impossible. One week at least would be required for the necessary preparations. Did I not realize—?

I cut him short, for I knew the native mind. Quite apart from the added risk of illness they'd be running, if I gave the inhabitants two or three days' grace I'd never get them out of that village at all. When it came to actually quitting their

homes forever they'd have time to think of a thousand reasons why they should stay, and it was thus a case of now or never.

"To leave on the morrow means life," I said sternly. "To stay means death for thee and thine. Choose, O headman."

They were brutal words, but necessary, and they had their effect.

"As the lord wills," he answered meekly after a pause. "We are in his hands. But how are the sick and weak to walk? Will the lord bring down his elephants for them?"

I shook my head. Elephants, even could they arrive in time, were out of the question; the lack of water on the march alone prohibited their use, and there were several other reasons besides.

"We will build stretchers," I said, "and the strong among us will carry the weak."

"And our beasts, master?"

The sole worldly wealth of the villagers lay in their cattle and buffaloes, and without them they'd never stir a yard. There was nothing, therefore, but to take the brutes with us somehow. Many, of course, would die; for the march to Cha Kum would have to be made slowly and a night in the forest spent on the way; and as for water, we'd be lucky if we struck enough for ourselves. If half the livestock survived the owners might think themselves fortunate, and I told the headman as much.

"Nevertheless we take them, lord, together with our dogs and our chickens."

I drew the line at chickens, and solved that problem by buying the entire hen community of the village for the sum of fifty ticals, or some five pounds in English money. I then sent the headman off to rouse the villagers to action, whereupon I set my own coolies to the task of building stretchers.

When the work was ended I walked down to the village in the waning light of the evening to see how the headman's orders were being carried out.

To my surprise I found the huts deserted save for those who were unable to walk. Inquiries revealed that the population had streamed to the little temple at the farther end of the village, and from curiosity I too went down there.

The bronze figure of Buddha in the main building winked with the gleams of hundreds of candles. Over his head, suspended from the roof, quaint tinsel ornaments tinkled in the faint breeze and caught the light of the candles. Before him moved a ceaseless procession of the brown people who had come to make a last offering to the image of their Lord Gautama. Pathetic bunches of withered flowers, bowls of rice, sweetmeats they ill could spare were laid at his feet by the worshipers. One by one they filed past him, salaaming profoundly, and when all had made obeisance the people assembled in the *sala* in the outer courtyard of the temple.

Here Tu Chao, the old priest of the village, was seated. Next to him were his eight yellow robed novices, and round them the people were squatted in a circle. The priest was about to deliver an address, and I drew near the ring to listen to it. I was a Christian, and the Laos Buddhists; yet they would not mind my presence, for nowhere in the world is religion more tolerant, more kindly than it is in the temples of Siam. Reverently, and in absolute silence, we listened to the words of the wizened old priest.

He began by telling us fairy tales, quaint legends of bygone days concerning the stars and the moon. Tales also of bears and elephants and monkeys he related, and the audience, from the tiniest brown mite to the oldest among them, listened breathlessly. Then, gradually and almost imperceptibly, he worked round to Gautama, their Lord Buddha. In simple, moving sentences he told us of the life of this great man, and of the eight-fold path of righteousness he trod. He exhorted his hearers to keep to this manifold path, then ended with his blessing upon all of us.

The priest's frail voice died away in the stars that now were glittering above us. An intense hush followed, then one by one the people salaamed to him, and

after placing offerings in his begging bowl, stole silently back to the village. The last to go were the eight novices; they were crying as they left the temple courtyard, and my breath caught with fear. What did this mean? They, and the people, had been saying goodby to him, even as they had said goodby to the image of Buddha. Was the priest not coming with us on the morrow?

Barefoot, I advanced and stood before him. I, John Foster the Christian, faced Tu Chao the Buddhist, alone in the temple of an Eastern night.

"Tu Chao," I whispered, "you come not with us?"

"My work is ended, but thine is not. White man, good luck to thee."

"Tu Chao, to stay here is death."

He smiled most beautifully.

"I am old," said he. "I seek Nirvana."

Nirvana, the blotting out, the dark, hopeless end of the Buddhist faith.

"Tu Chao," I whispered fearfully, "though your people come not back, I shall return. And all that I have shall be yours if you will but await my coming."

"I seek Nirvana," he repeated, and I knew that my pleadings were in vain. Long before I returned to Cha Kum he would be cold with death.

"Is there nothing I can do?" I said helplessly

"Naught, save to look after my people. Goodby, white man."

My figure loomed like a Colossus above this tiny, frail priest in the yellow robes, yet he was stronger than I and a hundred of my kind. I, the Christian, rendered him the salaam reserved for Kings and Princes, then left him to the death he faced with bright and fearless eyes.

In the village the inhabitants were now making feverish preparations for departure and, satisfied on that point, I hastened to my bungalow in the hopes of news concerning Grainger. Even as I crossed over the compound he came riding in from the other side, and we met at the foot of the steps. His eyes held inquiry and challenge, but I pointed to the village.

"First," I said, "go there. Then tell me whether you'll help or not."

He returned in half an hour, and I saw that his face was grim and set.

"I'm with you," he said shortly. "And the sooner we get 'em into Cha Kum the better."

The words lifted an immense load from off my shoulders. For the march before us I'd rather have Grainger with me than any man living.

CHAPTER XIV

THE EXODUS

WE SPENT the night in our clothes, and at the first signs of dawn walked down to the village to urge the inhabitants to hasten out of their huts, since an early start was imperative. The worst part of the journey would be along the twelve miles of bridle path that lay between the village and the cart road overlooking the valley, and thus it was doubtful whether we'd reach the cart road by nightfall, let alone Cha Kum another ten miles farther on.

Hampered by stretchers and the steep jungle hills, our pace would be barely a mile an hour, and we dare not march in the heat of the afternoon for the sake of the invalids. That left us from dawn till noon and from three till half past six to complete those twelve miles. Could we do it?

The start took us longer than anticipated: though each villager's household possessions could have been rolled into a fair sized pocket handkerchief, the last phases of leaving dragged on interminably. Both the strong and the weak seemed bereft of all initiative, and to make matters worse every man, woman and child was crying. They cried silently, hopelessly, terribly; the sight of those tears coursing down the brown, sunken faces haunts me yet, but we had to be firm and, at last, a good two hours after sunrise, the long journey to Cha Kum began.

It was a weird procession that trailed

out from the village and into the stark, gaunt stems of the forest. At its head walked myself, a loaded rifle in my hand; behind me followed the stretchers with the old, the sick and the very young; then came the cattle and buffaloes, led by their owners, then those of the village who could walk, then those of my personal servants I was taking with me.

Grainger, on foot and armed like me, brought up the rear. It was all very eery, very sad, with the grim trees towering above us and the village fading away in the distance, though other eyes than ours might have discerned a touch of humor in the presence among us of some twenty pariah dogs and seven cats which had refused to be left behind.

Soon the going became desperately hard, but we toiled on till noon, by which time both invalids and stretcher bearers were showing signs of distress from the sun. A clump of bamboo loomed ahead and, passing word down to Grainger, I called a halt and placed the stretchers in the shade. A dry watercourse was close at hand, and with the spades I'd had the foresight to bring I put every able bodied man on to digging. In thirty minutes they came to a little water, whereupon food and drink were served to the old and sick. The others had to do without; there was not enough water to go all round, and food would only increase our thirst. We then waited for the sun to lower.

There was little rest for Grainger or myself, however, for some of the invalids required constant attention if we were to win through without serious loss of life. We did what we could for them, and after three hours' halt started again on the journey.

Six o'clock found us still a good five miles from the cart road. The distance would take as many hours to cover and, since the treacherous path rendered any progress after dark impossible, I realized we would have to camp for the night in the jungle. What I had dreaded had come to pass. We were still well within the hunting range of the tigers, and the villagers knew it. If they had been frightened of them in the safety of their huts, what now in the depths of the forest?

We camped in a natural clearing near the dry bed of a jungle stream. While the men feverishly dug for water, Grainger and I began the task of sorting out the different families and getting them settled for the night. While thus employed I heard a shout of alarm come from one end of the clearing, and with one thought only in my mind leaped for my rifle, which lay on the ground a few yards away. Quick as I was in seizing it, Grainger had fired before I'd put weapon to shoulder, and I whirled to see—no tiger, but a pariah dog stretched dead in the center of the open space.

For a moment I was numbed with surprise, and then I understood. Foam flecked the creature's jowl, and its back was unnaturally arched. Hydrophobia had now been added to the dangers of the march.

Regardless of the protests of the villagers, we rounded up every dog in the camp, then, aided by my own coolies, who were thoroughly alive to the danger, we led the wretched brutes well out of sight of the camp and shot them one by one with our revolvers. It was a sickening, ghastly business, but it had to be done; by a miracle no one had been bitten by the dog already gone mad, but more cases were likely to occur in the night and I wasn't taking any chances.

As we turned in disgust from the scene the air was full of flying pinions. From all quarters of the heavens, late as the hour was, vultures were sweeping down to their hideous meal.

On arrival back at camp, to my surprise, nearly all the villagers were already fast asleep. I had expected fear to keep them wide awake till far into the night, but the heat and trials of the day had put them deep in the oblivion of utter exhaustion. I, too, was yearning for rest, but Grainger seemed as alert as ever.

"Going to lie down, Foster?" he asked suddenly, as if reading my thoughts.

"No," I answered. "No more than you

are. We'll keep watch on the invalids."

The long hours of the night began. The flames cast eery shadows over the grim sentinels of trees and the sleeping figures of man and beast. Every now and then a thirsty animal would moan, or one of the sick stir restlessly and gasp for water.

Though the hole dug in the dry stream close by had been quickly exhausted of water at the outset, before long a farther limited supply had seeped through from below, and Grainger and I made constant journeys to and from the hole. Soaking up the moisture with our handkerchiefs, we applied it to the lips and foreheads of the worst sufferers; but one Lao girl whom I attended seemed in very bad case. Scarcely sixteen years old, she yet had a tiny babe upon her breast. The babe was a mere shell, and the mother almost at the limit of her strength. She lay in a coma, and I had to force the drops of water through her lips. But I could not attend to her for long; there were many others who required my help, and reluctantly I was forced to leave her.

At midnight I came round to her again. I knelt down and with the aid of my torch peered at her and the babe. The forms were still. I felt the pulses of both, then took off my wrist watch and held its face close up to each small mouth. The glass came away undimmed, and I knew I was looking upon death. I rose and beckoned to Grainger, who came over to me. He felt at the hearts and pulses, then nodded.

"It's over," he said quietly.

"Strange," I whispered. "Both at the same time."

"I wonder. Perhaps first the child, and the mother knew and followed. Foster, she must have been damned tired!"

I roused the girl's husband and mother, who were sleeping near her. Both of them were ill with fever, but the news would have to be broken at once. We could not afford any unnecessary weight on the march, and—we were in the tropics.

But they had lived as Laos; they should be buried according to the Lao custom; and binding of the wrists would keep away evil spirits from the grave. And then, behind the clearing, we dug the grave itself.

The surface ground was iron hard, and for hour after hour we toiled without relief, for both coolies and villagers were utterly exhausted and should not be disturbed. By three o'clock in the morning we had made a deep, narrow grave and, leaving Grainger standing by it, I returned for the dead.

With the babe still on her breast, I tenderly lifted the girl and brought her back in my arms. The frail body was lowered, and then with our bare hands we sprinkled in earth till mother and child were lightly covered. My face was working as I took one last look at the outline of those little forms, and I saw Grainger cross himself.

"Come," said Grainger at last, and fearful lest our courage should fail us, we worked with our spades in a frantic burst of energy. Soon the earth was level with the ground, then slightly raised above it and the task was done. We picked up our rifles, which had never left our side, and returned to the clearing in silence.

IN TWO hours it would be dawn, and the night was very still. Even the sick had ceased their restless movements, while the crackling fires had almost died into oblivion. In that calm hush, with the grave behind us, all earthly quarrels faded into utter insignificance. I turned to Grainger.

"Need we go on like this?" I asked him.

He knew at once what I meant, and I felt in the silence that followed that the good and the evil in him were struggling for mastery. But which would have won I was not to know; even as I awaited his answer a sound came through the night that froze the nerves and set our pulses hammering. The tigers had followed us.

We leaped to the fires and piled more wood on them. This done, we stood guard one at each end of the clearing and listened intently. The low, hoarse moaning was now unmistakable; the killers, who

for over a fortnight had been lying low, were on the trail of man again. Nearer came the sound and nearer, and then, just as I was expecting to see the light of their amber eyes burning in the undergrowth, they slunk away. Perhaps they knew that two armed and desperate men awaited them.

Soon I heard them again, but this time they were far down the hill and their moans had turned to worrying snarls. I caught too the yammering of vultures and the frightened yap of a wild dog or jackal. The tigers had found the dead dogs and were driving off the scavengers.

With relief came the knowledge that I was tired out. Neither Grainger nor I had had a minute's rest for close on twenty-four hours, but dawn was near at hand and the march would shortly be renewed. To keep awake, I spent the last hour of darkness striding up and down the clearing, then when the east showed signs of paling roused the sleeping forms to another day of misery.

The last five miles to the cart road were exceptionally steep, and tired though we were, Grainger and I took turns in carrying the heaviest stretchers. At eleven o'clock in the morning we reached the cart road, but here the heat was worse, if possible, than in the forest, and a mile of glaring dust still separated us from the nearest well. But water we must have and, slowly and painfully, we trudged along the road till the blessed sight of a well relieved our tired eyes. At last a plentiful supply of water for both man and beast was assured.

The afternoon was spent under the shade of some tamarind and banyan trees that bordered the road, but again there was no rest for Grainger or myself. Nine miles still lay between us and Cha Kum, and though we could not reach the capital that night, warning must be sent of our arrival on the following morning.

Commandeering a passing Burmese rider and his pony, I gave him a hastily scribbled note with instructions to take it at once to the white *mem-sahib* in charge of the hospital. In this note I briefly informed Mary Collins of the situation, and asked her in turn to notify both Trevor and the Siamese authorities of our coming. When the Burmese had galloped off in a cloud of suffocating dust, we put three more miles of road behind us, then camped for the night in the compound of a wayside rest house.

I had now passed beyond the range of physical sensations. I felt neither hungry, nor sleepy, nor tired, and passed the night, like Grainger, in attending to the invalids. Again the sun rose richly in the East, and again we were forging ahead on that interminable march. We crossed the dry paddy fields outside Cha Kum, and figures came out from the town to meet us. More walking, more figures, and the white hospital gates swam into view. I saw Mary Collins, cool and gracious, moving about among the stretchers, and the kindly form of the Siamese *umphur* shepherding the rest of the villagers down a lane that ran toward the government *sala*. I was about to follow them, when old Trevor appeared from nowhere and took my arm.

"Where are you off to?" he asked.

I pointed to the backs of the villagers, but he pulled me round.

"You and Grainger are coming with me, my son. I've got my bungalow ready for you."

I nodded stupidly, and the three of us started up the lane. We reached Trevor's bungalow. There a drink was given me. I don't know what was in it, but after I'd swallowed it I came to myself and realized that I was very, very tired. Yet there was Grainger talking to Trevor and coolly smoking a cigaret as though he had just completed an ordinary day's jungle march!

Trevor led me into an airy bedroom, then left me. My last waking thoughts as I undressed were of Ralph Grainger. For two days and two nights he had performed the labors of Hercules, labors that had involved sheer, weight lifting feats of strength and carried out under conditions that would have killed any ordinary individual. My own great muscles had

rendered my share comparatively simple, yet he had emerged from the ordeal much the fresher of the two. The man had been glorious!

I fought with my clothes. The shedding of each separate garment was a task in itself, a task that taxed my failing strength to the utmost. I reeled through the net and my host's cool bed enfolded me. Sleep bore me off.

CHAPTER XV

GRAINGER SHOWS HIS HAND

I SLEPT through the rest of the day and the night that followed, to awake with a rare appetite, and Trevor's boy standing by my bed with breakfast on a tray. Breakfast in bed! An unaccustomed luxury for me, and more welcome than words could tell. When the meal was finished I dressed leisurely, and, as I strolled out on to the veranda, a note was handed me by a coolie from the hospital. The note was from Mary Collins, asking Grainger and myself to tea there that afternoon. Grainger, I saw, was down in Trevor's compound inspecting some ponies brought in by a turbaned Shan dealer and, joining him, I showed him the note.

"Coming?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Got to get back to the valley today," he said briefly.

"Today?" I echoed in amazement. "Aren't you going to rest, man?"

"I've had all the rest I want. And there's the mare to pick up from your stables before I reach my own place."

So that was why he was fretting. The mare was perfectly safe, yet I suppose he feared his new syce would neglect her in his absence.

"You're not going to *walk* the twenty-two miles back?" I exclaimed.

He made a gesture of impatience.

"Look here, Foster, do you think I'm going to waste time bargaining with this oily Shan if I'm not going to buy one of his ponies to replace my dun?"

"But your saddlery's all out in the forest," I growled, nettled by his tone.

"There's such a thing as borrowing a bridle and riding bareback, isn't there?"

"All right," I muttered. "And as you'll be out before me you might tell my syce to bring in Sunstar and the black to meet me tomorrow."

"The syce won't bring them in on his own. He'll be scared stiff."

"Then send three of my spare coolies in with him."

"All right—"

I glanced at the note in my hand.

"And what am I to tell Mary Collins?" I asked him. "I'm going there this afternoon if you are not."

"Exactly what I've told you."

"Usual to send some sort of message, isn't it? Sorry you can't come, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, for heaven's sake shut up and clear out," he snapped at me.

I swallowed a retort and reentered Trevor's bungalow. Grainger had shown his hand quite plainly. Our rapprochement caused by the evacuation of the village had been nothing more than a truce; now the truce was over and we were to be enemies again. Good. He'd find I wasn't going to make a fool of myself a second time through trying to be friendly.

"Couple of young fools. And I don't know which is the worst."

I started and turned on my heel. Old Trevor was standing behind me, wearing a grin that stretched from ear to ear.

"Thought you'd gone to the office," I said lamely.

"Not today. Had a rotten night. Not a wink of sleep, and listened to you two fellows snoring instead. This insomnia's getting me. Getting me badly."

"H'm," I muttered, as I gazed at his round, smiling countenance. "You don't look so bad on it."

"That's just my trouble, Foster. I *look* all right, but I feel all to pieces. I tell you sometimes—eh? what's that? A bridle? Get it from my syce, Grainger—eh? Oh, that's all right. Only too pleased. Come in again soon."

He yelled the last words to Grainger, who, leading his new pony—a nice, clean limbed chestnut—was already hurrying toward the syce's quarters. As soon as he'd disappeared from sight Trevor turned again to me.

"Where was I?" he said anxiously.

"You were calling us both fools," I lied, for I was tired of hearing of his imaginary complaints.

"Fools? Yes, and you are."

"Nothing to do with me this morning, Trevor. Grainger went off the deep end for no reason whatever."

"You mean to tell me you didn't see why he was angry?"

"No," I answered heatedly. "I did not."

"The note, man, the note!"

"What of it?" I demanded.

"You *still* can't understand?"

"No," I said.

"Then you're the biggest fool of the two, that's all I can say. Foster, he was peeved because that note was addressed to *you*."

"Nonsense. What did he expect? Did he want Mary to send us one each?"

"Goodness knows; but he was riled all the same."

"I don't believe you. It's all too childish."

"I entirely agree. For that matter, you've both of you been behaving like children for some time past."

This was more than I could stand.

"By the way, Trevor," I said ominously, "how do you know anything about this note business?"

"I was watching you from my bedroom window."

"Then an old man like you ought to be ashamed of himself. Got nothing better to do than to pry into other people's affairs and tell everybody you meet how ill you are? Why not try some real work for a change?"

For a moment he was flabbergasted, and then, recovering himself, he ordered me tersely out of his bungalow. I stalked down the steps, but at the bottom I paused and looked up at him. His good natured face was creased with mingled anger and pain, and a pang of compunction went through me. I had offended an old man and a kindly host as well.

"Trevor—" I walked slowly back up the steps—"I'll go as you ordered me, but don't think I'm not sorry."

"What do you mean?" he growled.

"You said I'm a fool," I answered. "I am. I shall always be a fool. But that doesn't matter in the least. The pity is that I can't always be a gentleman."

A short pause followed, and then to my intense surprise he roared with laughter and smacked his thigh.

"Gentleman be damned," he cried. "And as for a fool, we're fools the whole pack of us. The East, my boy. Addling our brains and turning our tummies. Come on in to the living room and have a gin sling."

We walked in arm in arm.

THAT afternoon I was seated in Mary Collins's private room. A hospital orderly had shown me in with the news that the white mistress would join me shortly, and as I waited for her I took stock of the little apartment. In contrast with the grimness of my forest surroundings, I might have been in another world. The flowers, the ornaments, the indefinable feminine touches about the room made me feel like a rough imposter. I sat with my paws between my knees without daring to move for fear of breaking some fragile dainty on the little table by my chair.

At last the door opened and Mary Collins was standing before me. She looked tired, but her clear eyes smiled in welcome as I rose and took her hand.

"John," said she, "it's good to see you again. But where's Ralph? Couldn't he come?"

"No," I replied rather shortly. "Said he'd got to get back to the valley today. He seemed in a hurry for some reason or other."

A swift look of disappointment flashed across her face, then was gone.

"Then we'll send away the extra cup and saucer." She clapped her hands and the boy entered with the tea.

"I always think an extra place looks so pathetic, don't you?" she said, after the servant had removed it.

"Never thought much about it," I growled. That disappointment she had shown had nettled me.

"John—"she leaned forward over the table—"you and Ralph have quarreled; I know that perfectly well, but I'd hoped that you'd made it up since you came in here together. Now, however, it seems that you haven't. Is that so?"

"It is," I said, "and there the matter ends. Kindly talk of something else."

"Not yet by any means. Now that we're on the subject we'll thrash the matter out. I'd hoped to have you both with me, but as it is you'll have to tell me your version."

"My version?" I exploded. "Do you think I'm going to lie about the man?"

"Some cake, John?"

"Eh? Oh, all right."

"Now finish your tea, and then you can tell me everything."

She wasn't to be denied, and when the boy had cleared the table I told her the rough details leading up to our quarrel, though of the final incident over her note I naturally made no mention.

"It's a thousand pities," she said, when I'd come to an end.

"Is it? I don't think so," I answered. "What Ralph Grainger does from now on doesn't concern me in the least."

"Then it ought to. Quite apart from other considerations, oughtn't you two to combine if you're going to stand any chance of rounding up these ghastly man eaters?"

"I was willing once, but I'm not now," I answered.

"And all this through one stupid bet."

"The bet has very little to do with it."

"On the contrary, I should say it has a lot to do with it. Small matters lead on to very big ones sometimes, don't they? John, that bet's at the back of your minds the whole time, egging each of you on."

"Nonsense. The bet's merely incidental. Point is, Grainger and I have agreed to differ and there we stand."

"I believe you've quarreled again since you've been in here."

"Possibly we have, though that doesn't matter one way or another. When we brought the villagers in we'd only agreed to a kind of truce."

"Then surely the presence of man eaters in your valley is sufficient for another one. I should have thought any two men with a scrap of decency in them would have come together if only for the sake of the poor, defenseless natives. There's such a thing as humanity, John."

She paused, and for the first time I became aware of a splitting headache. A little pulse was beginning to hammer on my brain behind the scar left by the polo accident, but I set my teeth against the pain. I mustn't go sick when Grainger had come through the march so well.

"Mary—"I banged a fist on the table—"I'm sick and tired of being lectured. First Trevor, now you, and as soon as I set my eyes on Malone and the others I suppose I'll hear the same thing from them. I'll leave this room at once if you don't change the conversation."

"You're no longer the John Foster I once knew."

"Who am I, then?"

"Just a stranger whom I've never met before."

"Seems to me," I said after a pause, "that every one's going off his head. Must be the heat. Grainger flaring up for no reason whatever, Trevor eternally grumbling about sciatica and rheumatism he hasn't got, and now you talking of me being a stranger. For goodness' sake let's be reasonable. Tell me about yourself and your father. I haven't even had the opportunity to ask about him yet."

"But first, John, you'll have a cigaret."

I took one from the tin she proffered.

"And now you'll lie down on that long cane chair while I tell you all about ourselves."

"I'm perfectly happy where I am."

"You'd be more comfortable over there."

"Think there's anything wrong with me?" I demanded.

Her eyes widened in surprise.

"No. Why should I?"

"Seem very solicitous on my behalf."

She laughed.

"My dear man, you'd be the last person on whom I'd waste sympathy. You're very well able to take care of yourself. I merely like to see my guests made comfortable, that's all. It makes me feel the same myself."

"If you put it that way," I muttered, and lay back in the chair with a cushion behind my head.

As the smoke from my cigaret spiraled through the lazy heat, Mary told me of the sickness that had spread throughout the land and of her father's heroic labors in the scattered jungle villages. Tommy Malone, too, had helped, for many of the villages lay near his forest and he and the doctor had worked together, thus leaving her free to superintend the hospital and the native doctors in Cha Kum. Behind the simple words lay an epic of self-sacrifice, and the more I listened the less that pulse kept hammering in my head. Of her own work Mary said nothing, but it didn't need much imagination to arrive at the part she must have played. She concluded by saying that though the heat still held the worst of the sickness was over and that in a week's time the doctor, accompanied possibly by Malone, would be back in Cha Kum.

No sooner had she finished when a clock on the mantelpiece struck six and she rose with an exclamation of surprise.

"I must fly," she said. "Rounds."

I stood up beside her, and my headache had completely vanished.

"Mary," I said, "I've behaved like a bear this afternoon. Funny, but I'm only just beginning to realize it."

She smiled—the first real smile she'd given me since I arrived.

"That's better. That's more like the real John."

"Had a bit of a headache."

"Has it gone?"

"Absolutely. You cured it."

"I'll see you tomorrow, then. Down at the club if I have time."

"I'm afraid I'm off to the valley tomorrow. My ponies are meeting me halfway."

"Must you go so soon? Another day's rest would do you no harm."

"But I've such a lot of things to do. I wouldn't be happy if I slacked away here when I ought to be up and out."

"Well, you know best. And John—" a hand was laid on my sleeve—"I hardly dare ask it. Isn't there one thing you would do for me?"

"Mary, I'd do anything for you," I said soberly.

"I wonder, John. You must know what I mean. I mean you and Ralph Grainger."

I froze.

"Anything but that," I said. "You don't understand men. There are certain acts that no man on earth can bring himself to do. In my case, to make friends with Grainger is one of them."

"You give, and you take away," she said sadly.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you, Mary," I said gently.

"You and Ralph gave your best when you brought the villagers in. I know, for I've spoken to many of them. No one, not even my father, could have been quite so splendid. You take away because—surely, John, it's obvious."

Sweet and sad, she gazed at me with imploring eyes. I longed to take her in my arms, but something held me back. And as for Ralph Grainger, I would not, I could not meet her wishes.

"Goodby, Mary," I said, and left her presence.

Back in Trevor's bungalow, I prepared to leave on the morrow.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST NATIVE

MY PONIES met me on the cart road at noon next day, and by four o'clock I was back in my forest bungalow. The first thing I did was to inquire of my compound coolies

whether anything had been seen of Tu Chao, the old priest. They replied that none of them had ventured near the temple since I'd left; they were afraid to do so. And with fear in my heart too I hastened through the deserted village and entered the temple courtyard.

There was no sign of him in the yard, and I was about to cross over to his living quarters when my eye caught some large pug marks on the sandy earth between the pagoda and the temple. I bent, and my mouth went suddenly dry; the killers had been here before me.

"Tu Chao," I shouted vainly, "Tu Chao."

There was no answer, save for the mocking echoes of my own voice and the whirring wings of some startled birds. In the waning light of the evening my surroundings loomed grim and uncanny; I found myself running madly toward the priest's quarters.

He was not there. I rushed back into the outer yard, and now I was raving curses at the killers who had defiled this holy spot with their vile presence. With no hope in my heart, I approached the entrance to the temple itself, then stopped dead in my tracks. Unharmed, Tu Chao the old priest was kneeling before the great bronze Buddha.

I whispered his name. He did not answer. I stole forward and touched his bare shoulder. The shoulder was cold. Tu Chao had attained Nirvana.

The tigers had come to slay, yet they had not touched this holy man. There was something strange in that, and I thrilled with mingled awe and relief. That evening I buried him under the shade of a tamarind tree that grew in the precincts of the temple.

The next day I began a round tour of my forest. No work had been done in my brief absence, and the majority of my foremen, together with their carting coolies, had bolted to their homes, taking with them the buffaloes used for haulage. The cart roads ran long and bare, with never a living soul in sight. The fear of the killers was spreading and spreading.

I visited some of the smaller villages above and below Hwe Tark. The inhabitants were one and all making preparations to depart, though their general condition was much better than that of the former Hwe Tark villagers, and in consequence they did not need my help to any great extent. Some were going to Cha Kum, others to a different jungle range where they would build a fresh hamlet. It mattered not where they went so long as they left the valley. I learned that one man had been taken by the killers on the first night of my stay in Trevor's bungalow, and I could not but agree with them that the valley seemed accursed. Death hovered over every village that remained in it.

At the end of my tour, which lasted a fortnight, the monsoon broke with a lashing of wind and rain, and I breathed in the cool fragrance of the air with gratitude. Now that the hot weather was definitely over, I brought out my elephants from their rest camp far up in the sources of the Mae Fah and had them ridden down to the river camp midway betwen Grainger's bungalow and my own. Here lay the timber I had measured in February, and the logs would now have to be rolled down the bank into the water, which already showed signs of rising.

To superintend the work, I put up my tent in the clearing where I had camped before. The stockade came in useful for my ponies, and now that a goodly number of mahouts and chainmen was present I hoped that my carrier coolies and personal servants wouldn't kick at the prospect of spending several nights in the jungle in the very spot where the tigress had made her first appearance.

As for the mahouts and chainmen, I was frankly pleased at their demeanor. I had expected trouble in ordering them down to the valley, but instead they seemed delighted to be back again. They even jested at the fears of my coolies, and it was only later that I realized the cause of their apparent fearlessness. So far they'd only *heard* of the man eaters' activities; they'd yet to sample the danger at close quarters.

We spent three days in rolling the timber down the bank, and then a night of terrific rain brought about the first rise of the season. When morning broke the Mae Fah was a broad band of yellow, swirling water, and I sent the elephants in at once. Stacks of logs were already beginning to form at treacherous, rock strewn bends in the river, and it was all important that the timber should be kept moving. Mounted on one of my tuskers, a placid bull too old for active work, I went up and down the bank directing operations.

Is there any spectacle, I wonder, that can surpass in magnificence the sight of one hundred elephants, all in the prime of condition, "ounging" timber down a swollen jungle stream? Crash! A great teak log collided with a rock head on and swung round broadside to the current. The other end of the log was caught by a jutting portion of the bank opposite and the river was blocked from one side to the other. More logs were riding down upon the first. Boom! Boom! Hollow and sullen. A pile, a jam was forming.

"Four tuskers down here quick. Get a move on, you mahouts. What's that? The water too deep? Nonsense. Get your elephants *in*."

Thank God, none of the four refused, though the water was up to their chests and another twelve inches would have swept them away.

They were soon right under the stack, having approached it from below.

"Careful. That's it, the key log! Poo Noi's tusks are under one end of it, but what's wrong with Poo Luang?"

The ends of his tusks were too sharp and they were slipping?

"I'll cut three inches off them this evening. Mahout of Poo Koo, take Poo Luang's place. Now together, lift, confound you!"

The key log moved, and a moment later the whole stack dissolved with a crackling roar on top of mahouts and elephants—Poo Noi, Poo Luang, Poo Koo, Poo Ten, fighting for their lives in all the grandeur of their strength. Huge as they were, they lunged with lightning speed in order to splay the logs apart. Tusks flashed, trunks shot and curled, huge foreheads fended off great balks that would crush a man to instant death, and the mass was flattened out and once more on the move.

Leaving the four to guard that point, I urged my old tusker five hundred yards upstream. Here twenty more elephants were working. No stack had yet formed, but the timber was coming down faster and faster from the north. On some of the logs I saw the hammer mark of Grainger's company. This meant that he, too, had his elephants out, but I treated his timber the same as mine. The Mae Fah was the common outlet for both our firms.

The uproar as I rode up and down the river was terrific. The bellowing and trumpeting of elephants, "swooshes" of collapsing portions of the bank, crackling and booming of timber, yells of mahouts and chainmen, thrumming of the stream, my own hoarse commands—these and other sounds combined to make one great blare of noise.

By evening the rise was over. The Mae Fah sank to its normal level, and the logs began to ground on the shallows. Yet I estimated that a good three thousand logs had reached the main Mae Lome since morning, and once in this mighty river a quick journey to the rafting stations was assured. A good day's work had been done by both man and beast and, dismissing the elephants, I returned to my tent in a happier frame of mind than I'd been in for weeks.

THAT night, however, brought fresh troubles along with it. I was roused from a deep sleep by a sound of my elephants threshing and trumpeting. With hobbles round their forelegs to prevent them from straying too far, they were grazing in the jungle behind my camp; but instead of feeding quietly they were evidently very much on the alert. Something was disturbing them. Deer, buffalo, pig, bears, none of these animals is wont to alarm an

elephant. What else? Panthers? Panthers are sneaking beasts and keep well out of the way of anything much bigger than themselves. That left only tigers!

I could do nothing till dawn. The night was pitch dark, and it would have been suicide to venture out of camp. I might have been trampled to death by the very creatures I had come to help. The grown elephants, of course, could very well take care of themselves, but I was anxious on account of some of the smaller *butchas*. With my rifle close by me, I waited till the clearing broadened in the early morning light, then hastened out.

Elephants, even while hobbled, sometimes move three or four miles in a night while grazing, and my search might prove a long and arduous one. I passed several big tuskers, now grazing quietly, but when about a mile and a half from camp I heard the sounds of a female in distress. Pushing on, I came to a small natural clearing. In it a distracted mother, who had somehow got rid of her hobbles, was circling round and round the body of her dead calf.

I recognized the mother at once. She was one of the best female workers I possessed, while her calf, born some eighteen months before, had looked a promising youngster. Though normally a mild, good mannered brute, directly she saw me she charged with the utmost fury, and I was forced to fly for my life. I must shoot only as a last resort.

I tore back desperately in my tracks, but she was gaining rapidly on me and I was about to bring my rifle into use when by sheer luck I ran right into dear old Poo Kih. Poo Kih had been one of my baggage carriers throughout every wet season for years, and on many an evening had I fed him with the soft, crushed tamarind pulp he loved. Though startled by my sudden appearance, he recognized me at once, and I took shelter behind his enormous body.

I was none too soon, for a second later the cow was on us like a fury. My danger still was great, but luckily for me the blind rage caused by the death of her calf caused her to attack the first living creature in her path, and she went headlong at the innocent Poo Kih.

Now Poo Kih was a misogynist. Never once had I seen him grazing in the company of one of the opposite sex, and this sudden onslaught by one of them aroused him to righteous indignation. Bellowing with wrath, he pushed and prodded her away from the bamboo clump on which he had been browsing, and finally the poor, distracted mother broke off the unequal contest and shuffled back to her calf. I then ran the rest of the way to my camp.

I found the mahouts grouped outside my tent. By rights they should have already been mounted on their elephants and engaged in straightening out the logs left stranded in the river but, aware of some unusual happening, they were awaiting my return before setting out to work. Work, however, being now out of the question, I armed them with bamboo spears, then brought them back with me to the clearing where the calf lay dead.

But I need not have feared; by the time we arrived the cow had changed from an avenging demon to a broken hearted mother. Vast and infinitely pathetic, she drooped by the body of her offspring, and we were able to enter the clearing without fear of molestation.

My mahouts soon picked out the tracks of the killers on the muddy earth. There were two pairs, one slightly smaller than the other; there was no doubt that the tigress and her mate had been responsible. They had evidently attacked and slain the calf, but had been driven off by the mother before they could drag the body away. The calf being beyond all aid, I made a close inspection of the mother.

The poor creature, I now saw, was terribly slashed. A few minor wounds indicated the work of Poo Kih's tusks, but the weals on head, trunk and forelegs could have only been made by a tiger's claws. The wounds on the trunk were particularly severe; the flesh hung in ribbons and, since the trunk of an elephant is the most precious part of its make-up, I knew there

was only one thing to do for her. My rifle would have to be used after all.

I shot her at point blank range, and she fell without a sound. A quick death was better than a slow fading away from starvation and septic poisoning.

The score against those striped devils was mounting up and up and up. I resolved to have another try at them that very night.

The clearing was ideal. Plenty of trees surrounded it, while the ground by the bodies was free of shrubs and tall grass. Some time had now elapsed since the killers had experienced rifle fire, and they might have been lulled into a sense of false security. They might return to the clearing after dark, I reasoned, and if so, I swore I'd bag at least one of them. A *machan* for an all night vigil had to be prepared.

As no humans had been slain, my mahouts readily obeyed my orders. A bamboo ladder was soon run up a suitable tree, and a platform with a thick leaf canopy built across a fork. The sky would be moonless and cloudy, so I had a lantern fixed to a bough above me; tigers are accustomed to jungle fires, and a small light should not necessarily scare them. Having obtained a supply of food and drink from camp, I dismissed my men and climbed up into the tree. Another long ordeal had begun.

Evening stole over the clearing, and with it three vultures swept down. I expected more, but none came and the three were left in undisputed possession. With these as my companions, I watched the night descend.

The long hours passed, yet no tawny shapes slunk in to reward my eyes, and when dawn at last paled I climbed wearily down to the ground. The vultures were still there, but frightened though they were at my sudden appearance, they were too gorged to rise. Sick with repulsion, I trudged back the mile and a half to camp.

On arrival there I found terror and consternation. The tigers had struck while I was in the *machan*. About midnight, so said my pallid faced boy, one of the chainmen who had been sleeping in the outer ring of the camp had been heard to shriek. No one had dared to investigate, and the remainder of the men had drawn in closer to the fires, but at dawn they had found some of the victim's blood stained clothing clinging to some bushes near where he had slept. One of his friends, too, had smelled the tigers as they had struck.

In vain I asked myself a dozen different questions. Why had the tigers first slain the elephant calf instead of one of my men? Why had they not returned to the kill? Why had they then chosen to invade my camp instead? One might as well have asked the moon; there was no foretelling what they would do from one day to another; that was the terrible thing about them.

Tired though I was, I abandoned all thought of a rest or meal and fought through the jungle in the wake of the killers. I was soon forced to give up, however. A tiger can carry a man as easily as a cat a kitten, and the two of them might have gone for miles. Exhausted, I reeled back to camp, to discover the place deserted. Mahouts, chainmen, coolies, servants, elephants, even my syce with the ponies had cleared off, and from their tracks I knew that they had made for the safety of my bungalow at Hwe Tark, four miles to the south. There was nothing for it but for me to go there too.

My men were there when I arrived, and evidently in mind for a palaver, but I was too hungry and tired to listen to them and, after a hasty meal, fell into a deep sleep. When I awoke it was evening, and on leaving the bedroom I saw that the whole of my men were grouped on the veranda. At their head stood my cook, who had made himself the spokesman of the party. He salaamed as I appeared.

"*Nai. Kaw Awk*," said he.

Three simple words, but loaded with significance.

"Master, wish leave."

I looked along the rows of brown faces, and read the inexorable truth. They,

like the villagers, had finished with the valley, nor could I find words to blame them.

"And when do you wish to go?" I asked him.

"Tomorrow, master."

My mind was already made up. Go they might, but I would stay, stay till the valley was rid of this terrible scourge that had put an end to work, happiness, even life itself.

"Should the tigers be killed, wilt thou and the others be willing to return to my service?" I asked.

"Lord, we will," answered the old cook. "For our hearts are sore at leaving you."

My own heart leaped. I'd get work in the valley started again if I had to spend a year alone in it first. Every one of those men should come back to me, but meantime I must have food and I must have mahouts to take care of my elephants. I beckoned to the head mahout.

"Ai Oy," said I, "thou shalt take the elephants into Cha Kum. There thou shalt hobble them in the jungle near the town and tend them till I send for thee again."

"As the lord wills," answered the mahout meekly. "Will he give us full pay for doing this?"

"He will," I assented. "Provided that once a month thou and two other mahouts bring out stores and mails for me. The head clerk of the company at Cha Kum will give thee what I require. And as for the danger, wilt not thou and thy companions be riding on your elephants?"

To my relief he agreed, and then, accompanied by my cook, I went into the cookhouse behind the bungalow to check up stores. A fresh consignment had but recently arrived, and I had plenty to last me out the month. I had flour, biscuits, tea, sugar, condensed milk, a variety of tinned meats and vegetables, while for fresh food I could rely on the chickens I'd bought from the villagers and odd birds brought down by my gun.

My cook then gave me a few simple lessons in the art of using his pots and pans, after which I settled up the wages of those men who were leaving my company's service. I spent most of the night writing letters to Bangkok and Cha Kum, and when morning broke said good-by to my men. By seven o'clock the last of them had disappeared up the bridle track leading to the distant cartroad, and I was alone with my thoughts.

They turned to Ralph Grainger. Had his men also left him? Somehow I felt sure they had. He and I were therefore the only humans in the valley. I ran down into the compound, where the chickens were pecking at scraps, and swung open the door of the stables. Sunstar and the black came nosing at me, but I wanted more than that. A sudden, overwhelming desire for Grainger's company was mine. With the black in lead and riding Sunstar, I set out on the eight miles that separated me from Grainger's bungalow.

CHAPTER XVII

ALONE

AS I RODE into his compound an ominous calm prevailed. Not a living human being was in sight, though the presence of the gray and the chestnut in the stables told me that Grainger himself was somewhere about. He was not in his bungalow, however, and I sat down and awaited his arrival.

It was long past noon before I saw his lean figure striding over the little compound. He came from downriver, and a rifle was in his hand. As he ascended the bungalow steps I rose to meet him—

"Afternoon, Grainger."

"So you've arrived." He sank into a chair and began taking off his puttees and boots. "I thought you would, sooner or later."

"Why?"

"To tell me all your troubles."

"So your men have gone too?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"When did they leave?"

"Yesterday."

"Mine only left this morning."

"That so? Then they waited longer than mine did."

"What excuse did yours give?"

"The killing of the chainman."

"They weren't long in hearing about it. I myself only knew yesterday morning."

Grainger flung his sodden boots into a corner.

"You talking for the sake of talking?" he snapped.

I ignored the remark.

"Where have you been just now?" I asked him.

"Out after the tigers behind your camp."

"Any luck?"

"No."

"What are you going to do next?"

"That, Foster, is my affair."

"Going to stay on in the valley?"

"Yes. Are you?"

"I am. Got enough stores to carry on with?"

"Do you think I'd stay on if I hadn't?"

"Could have lent you some of mine if you'd wanted them."

"Well, I don't."

I walked past him to the head of the steps, a sudden hot anger in my heart. In spite of my declaration to Mary Collins, I'd come to see Ralph Grainger with the deliberate intention of trying to make friends with him again. The fear of being alone had caused me to do this, and I cursed my cowardice. At the moment I was more angry with myself than with him; I'd asked for a rebuff and got it.

At the top of the steps I paused.

"That bet," I said. "I'll raise it to three thousand ticals if you've got the guts to take me."

"Make it five," said Grainger, "and I will."

"Five thousand, then. So long."

"So long."

I left him and rode back to Hwe Tark. In the bungalow I cooked myself a meal, then pondered over the situation. Now that the rainy season had begun the stalking of the tigers would be rendered doubly difficult, but my hands were no longer tied with work and, except for looking after my own immediate needs and those of my ponies, I was free to devote my whole time to the killers.

It might be, of course, that as all the natives had gone the tigers also would leave the valley, but on second thought I dismissed this as improbable. Tigers resemble domestic cats to a certain extent; once accustomed to a particular locality they are loath to leave it, and since the tigress and her mate still lived largely on game I thought them likely to remain. I then worked out plans in my head for luring them to my rifle till the waning light warned me that preparations must be made for my first night alone in the compound.

First, I made my ponies comfortable and gave them their evening feed of paddy. This done, I fed the chickens. By day these wandered about the compound, but by night they perched themselves in any suitable place they could find. Most of them had already taken over the coolies' huts, and I found three eggs for supper. The pleasure I derived from this was intense. I then returned to the bungalow through the thick drizzle that was falling and leaned over the veranda railings to survey the desolate scene.

No tinkling of buffalo bells, no chants of ploughman, no laughter of maidens from the village on my right. Instead a row of quiet huts into which the jungle was already pushing feelers. A few short weeks and the village and the temple would be completely overwhelmed by that remorseless tangle of green.

The jungle, thickening hour by hour in the rain, was all round me now. It lapped round the back and sides of my compound, it spread its dark mantle over the opposite bank of the Mae Fah, it shrouded the land with an ever increasing menace. Go near it, go into it, and detail will come to the eye: ficus, nettle grass, elephant grass, thorn, creeper, orchids, toadstools, evergreen, bamboo, trees of teak, cotton, ironwood, hundreds of kinds of trees, hundreds of kinds of bushes, hundreds of kinds of weeds and coiling

things and straight and crooked things, but viewed from any distance the jungle is one great, indescribable whole.

It looms, a huge, black-green mass of vegetation. Poised on the bank of the Mae Fah, I could almost imagine it breaking like some enormous wave in a froth of glaucous foam on the placid breast of the river. And, somewhere in that mass, lurked murder, foul and hideous.

Fear caught me with icy hands. I hastened in from the veranda and lighted oil lamps in every room. My own shadow on the walls mocked me, and my breath came in gasps. I seized my rifle. Did I hear a sound outside? I listened. Only the weep of the rain on the roof and the stamping of my ponies. I looked at my forearm. The skin was raised in tiny lumps, but the muscles underneath were firm and a strange fancy took me. Ralph Grainger and I were the only humans in the valley; without doubt our end would come through the claws of the tigers. But I was strong, and Grainger wiry; so we'd make pretty poor eating, both of us. The tigers would find us tough.

The idea was ludicrous. I began to laugh. I pictured the tigers rolling on the ground in an agony of indigestion after devouring us. I laughed louder and louder. I saw the tigers dying of indigestion, and myself and Grainger arguing in hell as to which of us had won the bet. This seemed funnier still and I reeled about the bungalow, convulsed in helpless mirth.

Somehow I staggered into the bedroom. There I saw a face. It was not my own, and it stared at me from a looking glass. It had wild, bloodshot eyes, thick stubble round the chin, and a mass of unkempt hair above it. I started back in horror; the face did likewise. I lunged at it, then clapped my hands over my eyes. I, John Foster, had seen madness written upon my own features.

The shock sobered me. I must keep a tight grip on myself if I were to remain sane during the weeks of loneliness ahead. Water! I must boil some water!

I soon had a kettle going in the kitchen, and when the water was ready I shaved myself without the aid of a glass. I dare not look in one as yet. I then bathed, brushed my hair, and changed from my dirty jungle clothes into a suit of clean whites. This done, I peered fearfully into the glass. To my intense relief I saw not a madman, but mine own self again.

I returned to the kitchen and made a meal of eggs, tinned meat and biscuits, washed down with whisky and water. Feeling better, I went into the living room and began to read a book.

I found it difficult to concentrate. The wick of the oil lamp sputtered, and I started from my chair in fright. The creaking of a board, the rustle of a lizard in the roof, the slightest increase in the patter of the rain, these and other sounds brought but one word to my brain—tiger!

Half past ten—my normal bedtime. I yearned to sleep in the stables, but at all cost I must keep to routine. The first night would be the worst. After that I'd get accustomed to the loneliness. I put out the lamp and turned in.

Silence, save for the thin weep of rain and the shrill of mosquitoes outside the net. I fell into an uneasy doze.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SHOWDOWN

I SPENT my first week alone in searching up and down the banks of the Mae Fah for pug marks or other signs of the tigers. I found nothing, though once after dark I heard them calling to one another. They were therefore still in the valley and likely to remain there. Abandoning all further thought of tracking them through the hopeless mazes of the jungle, I started on another method. If I could not come to them, they should come to me.

I reckoned this way: Sooner or later the desire for human flesh would return with overwhelming force to the tigress in particular. The desire would be so great

that it would conquer any reluctance she still might have in facing a man with a rifle. I must therefore advertise my presence in the bungalow as much as possible, but how?

I knew that a tiger's sense of smell is very poor, and that it relies in hunting almost entirely on its powers of seeing and hearing. These powers are so highly developed that to the human mind they are almost fantastic, none the less they would help me in my scheme for substituting myself as a live bait in place of some animal.

I would prowl around the compound every evening till an hour after dark, making a noise, but not too much noise, as I did so. I would then go into my bungalow and a short time later apparently retire for the night. In reality, however, after extinguishing all the lamps I would noiselessly creep down the steps and crouch in waiting *underneath* the bungalow, which was built on tall stilts as a protection from the damp and snakes. To remain in the bungalow was obviously out of the question; they could come upon me unawares round any corner, while if I closed myself in one of the rooms I'd be making a death chamber of it. One blow of a mighty paw and the thin woodwork would be smashed to smithereens, then in they would plunge before I had time to fire. Beneath the bungalow, however, I'd have a clear circle of vision all round the compound, which they'd have to cross before reaching the building. There was a danger, of course, that they might go for my ponies instead of me; the stables were situated right at the edge of the compound alongside the encircling jungle, and in consequence I would not see the killers if they attacked at that point. But I had to risk this contingency, and in any case I hoped that the walls of the stables, which were built of much stouter wood than the bungalow, would resist any onslaught made upon them.

The scheme was, I realized, flirting with death, but I'd reached such a pitch of pent up terror that I had to go through with it. It's only when you're really afraid that you deliberately seek out danger.

I began the routine. The first night under the bungalow passed without incident, and so did the second and third, but on the fourth something happened. The darkness was relieved by a faint shimmer, and round about midnight a low, sinuous shape detached itself from the pitch black jungle and began sliding over the clearing. I caught the flash of amber eyes, and slowly raised rifle to shoulder. The tigress! Though the outline of the body was dim, it must be her, for the tiger would have been much larger. He'd be following her, perhaps, but what matter if he escaped so long as I could bring an end to *her* career? She was far the more dangerous animal of the two.

I wanted to squeeze the trigger, but my hands were shaking. One should be calm before firing. Ah, she's stopped now, halfway over the clearing. Again the flash of amber eyes. Now or never—*crash!* My rifle roared.

The thing was whirling round in circles. Faster and faster it went, revolving on its own axis like some ghastly, living top. I'd wounded it, mortally perhaps. I fired my second barrel into the whirling shape, and it fell and lay still. I reloaded and pumped two more bullets into it. No chances of its getting away this time. And then, with my eyes glued to where it lay, I waited till dawn before approaching it. There was one chance in a hundred that the tiger might yet be added to my bag before daylight.

He never came, and when the light broadened I rose from beneath the bungalow and strode boldly up to my kill. A great elation was mine, so much so that I shouted my triumph to the waning stars. My voice, flung back by the hills, seemed to mock me. Ten paces from the shape I halted. The rifle dropped with a clatter from my nerveless fingers. I rubbed my eyes fiercely to rid myself of an illusion. The illusion persisted. I advanced another five paces, then sank on to the ground and buried my head in my arms. I was suffering from one of the bitterest

disappointments of my life. Instead of the tigress, I had killed an exceptionally large panther.

The sun was riding high before I roused myself. Panthers abounded in the forest, and this one had evidently been after my chickens. The saving of a few chickens, however, was small compensation for the fact that my four shots would have warned the tigers of my intentions should they have been near the bungalow at the time. I must hope, therefore, that my shots had passed unheard and meanwhile remove the carcass of the panther from the compound.

I started to drag the body down to the river with the intention of rolling it in. The skin, though torn in places by the bullets, would have made a splendid trophy, but I knew nothing of taxidermy and the skin would have to go along with the rest. The panther, however, weighed as much as a very heavy man and I soon retired into the bungalow for a meal and sleep.

Late that afternoon I went out again and after half an hour's terrific toil got the brute down to the river bank. I was stooping to give him the final impetus, when a voice sounded behind me.

"I've seen fellows at a few queer jobs," it drawled, "but I reckon this one beats the band."

With a start I rose upright, to see Tommy Malone of all people standing on the path.

"You!" I exclaimed.

"Me," said Tommy. He pointed to the panther. "What's the great idea?"

"Getting rid of it."

"So I see. Isn't the skin worth keeping, though?"

"Can *you* skin it?"

"No."

"Then give us a hand."

Together we heaved the carcass into the river, then I led Tommy into my bungalow.

"And now," said I, "perhaps you'll explain how and why you've come here."

He did so. He and the doctor had arrived in Cha Kum eight days ago, both of them having stayed out near his forest three weeks longer than Mary Collins had expected. Since then he'd been resting in the capital, though the day being fine, he'd taken the opportunity of riding out this morning to see how I was getting along.

"Riding?" I exclaimed. "Where's your pony?"

"Somewhere on the cart road. When we got to the turning into your valley he went on, you see."

I looked at the mud on Tommy's clothes, and understood.

"But your pony'll be lost."

"Not he. Some one'll find him on the road and take him back to Cha Kum. That sort of thing's often happened before."

"H'm," I breathed. "So you walked the last twelve miles."

He nodded.

I glanced at the holster on his belt. With no other weapon than a revolver, he'd tramped for several hours alone through a jungle known to be terrorized by man eaters. Even a fellow like Malone would have hesitated to do that unless something very important had warranted it. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him flash a swift glance at my face, and my suspicions were confirmed. Old Trevor, Mary Collins and he had been putting their heads together, and in another half hour the usual lecture would begin. I needed a holiday. I should come into Cha Kum and bring Grainger with me. It was indeed a pity that the two of us . . .

"Malone," I said, "if you start in on this kind of talk you'll leave my bungalow a damned sight quicker than you entered it."

"Sorry, John. Didn't know you objected to hearing about the adventures of my pony."

I bit my lip, for I'd shown my hand too soon and made a fool of myself into the bargain.

"Let's have some tea," I said gruffly.

"Thanks. We'll have it in your kitchen. It's quicker."

Over tea I again caught him looking at me in that queer manner.

"You'll know me soon," I said irritably.

"Only thinking how fit you looked," he answered.

"Yes," I said. "I'm very fit. Never been fitter in my life, in fact."

"Splendid. Wish the same could be said for young Dick Mannering."

"Dick Mannering? What's he to do with it?"

"He's been in trouble."

"How's that?"

"Don't know the full facts of the case, but it appears that an outbreak of dysentery occurred in his forest at the end of last month. He thought it was cholera and came bolting into Cha Kum. Soon as he got there he realized what he'd done and went back to nurse his men. Found it was only dysentery, but several had died in the meantime. Wouldn't have happened if he'd stayed out by them with his medicine chest."

"He ought to go home," I said briefly. "Hasn't got the courage of a flea."

"I'm sorry for him, though. The last teak-walla who saw him said he was in the dickens of a state. Talked about using his revolver on himself, and all that sort of thing."

"If he's in that state he's only himself to blame."

"You didn't seem to think that last—" Malone suddenly broke off the sentence as if he had said too much, and asked for a cigaret.

"Go on," I urged, passing him one.

"Let's chuck talking for a while. What about a bath? I'm as muddy as a buffalo."

"You look it," I said, and left him to get one ready.

A half-hour later I heard Malone's execrable voice rising from the bathroom.

When he appeared I glared at him for an instant, then burst out into the first sane laughter I'd had for weeks.

"Tommy," I cried, "I'm damned glad to see you here. For heaven's sake, let's have a drink on the strength of it."

I think that evening was one of the happiest I'd ever spent in my life. Ah, but it was good to have real companionship again: to feel loneliness and danger receding into the background, if only for a few hours: to talk and joke of the intimate, trivial things of life. Tommy kept the conversation away from dangerous matter; not a word concerning Grainger or even the man eaters was mentioned, and at eleven o'clock I turned in and slept better than I had done for a long time. I was in my own comfortable bed, with a friend in the spare room, and the tigers could go to the devil for all I cared.

NEXT morning, after breakfast, he signified his intention of returning to Cha Kum, as the day was comparatively fine and the opportunity not one to be missed in the height of the southwest monsoon.

"I'll get out Sunstar and the black," I told him. "We'll ride as far as the cart road. After that you ought to be able to get a bullock wagon to take you the rest of the way."

He hesitated.

"Matter of fact, I'd thought of looking up Grainger first. It'll only add a mile or two on to the journey."

I shrugged my shoulders. If he wished to visit the man it was none of my affair. I offered him a lift as far as Grainger's bungalow which he accepted with alacrity, and by nine o'clock we were riding up the opposite bank of the Mae Fah. Sunstar was far too well behaved for the worst rider to fall off him, and the eight miles passed without incident. A few hundred yards from Grainger's bungalow, however, I pulled in the black to a halt.

"Mind walking the rest of the way, Tommy?"

"You not coming too?"

"No," I answered, rather shortly.

"Right." He dismounted and patted Sunstar. "Any — er — messages for Grainger?"

"None that I can think of."

"Well, so long, John."

"Not so fast. He might be out. I'll wait here for half an hour in case he is.

Can't have you walking up to the cart road on your own. We could take the short cut that runs from his compound."

"Don't worry. If he's out I'll stay in his bungalow until he arrives."

"Thought you were in a hurry to get back to Cha Kum."

"Not so much as all that, John."

We parted, I taking my ponies back to Hwe Tark and he going up to Grainger's bungalow. He seemed mighty keen, I thought, on seeing Grainger, but again that was nothing to do with me and I dismissed the matter from my mind.

Back in my own place I busied myself with household tasks till evening, when to my surprise Grainger galloped into the compound on his gray mare. Flinging the reins over a stake in the fence, he walked quickly up the bungalow steps and we met on the veranda. His first words were as surprising as his unexpected arrival:

"Must you send some one else? If you want to come cringing round my place haven't you got the guts to tell me so yourself?"

Speechless with anger and astonishment I glared at him.

"What the hell do you mean?" I demanded.

"You know perfectly well. You tried to act through Malone."

Now I understood. Dear old Tommy had visited Grainger for the sole purpose of trying to bring about a reconciliation between us, and the latter had taken it for granted that I was behind him in this.

"Malone acted entirely on his own," I said. "As for my trying to make friends with you, I'd sooner have a cobra as companion. So get out of here, and stay out."

"That's better," he sneered. "I'd rather have you like that than showing yellow."

I took a pace toward him.

"I wonder if you would," I said grimly. "I told you to get out of here a second ago, but I take that back. You'll stay here a few more minutes yet, my friend."

"With pleasure," he mocked.

"First, where's Tommy Malone? In your bungalow?"

"No. Gone back to Cha Kum."

"You let him go alone?"

"Why not? He wanted to. And nothing would hurt *him*."

This was true to a certain extent, but now the remark served only to add fuel to my wrath.

"I've a good mind to give you the thrashing of your life," I told him.

"If you can," he said lightly.

The silence that followed was broken by a lashing of hoofs in the compound, and turning, I saw that Grainger's mare had jerked her reins off the stake. She'd reached my ponies' stables and for sheer devilment was flinging out her heels at the door. I pointed to her.

"Get that foul beast of yours tied up properly, then come back here."

"You call her that, do you?" Grainger's face whitened, for he loved the mare.

"Yes," I said. "I do."

For answer he picked up a jug of water that stood on a table and with a lightning movement flung the contents in my face.

I dashed the water from my eyes.

"You're for it now, Grainger," I said.

He knew what was coming to him, but he had courage. Balancing on the balls of his feet, he faced me unflinchingly.

"First," I went on, "do as I told you."

He went down the steps, secured the mare, then returned. I took off my tunic. He did likewise.

"Ready?"

"Ready," he answered, and dived at me.

TO BE CONCLUDED

WHAT? NO SOUND!

Strange Adventures of the Newsreel Men ~by One of Them

CHARLES PEDEN

THE NEWSREEL CLUB is a great place to hear a good tale. Material enough to fill a five foot shelf could be gleaned from the conversations that take place there. The very decorations of the great lounge room are conducive to reminiscence. A spirit of adventure pervades its atmosphere. Trophies from all over the world adorn its walls, mementoes of stories sent in by roving cameramen. As a distinctive perfume will conjure up forgotten moments, so do these inanimate objects recall past experiences.

I happened to be present the other day when Phil Nixon—he grinds for Premier News—signed for a large rectangular case. Upon opening, a huge air propeller, whose tips were badly splintered, was revealed.

"Where did that old relic come from?" I asked as Phil instructed a couple of men to mount it over the mantel.

"From a blimp," he answered laconically.

"Why the shattered ends?" I persisted. "I should think it would be a pretty handsome outfit if you'd have them cut off and the butts polished."

"Nothing doing!" he exclaimed; then added, making a wry face, "That rig stays as is. A memento of a sad, sad experience."

"Come on," I said. "Here's a comfortable divan. Let's have the sordid details." I knew he was aching to talk to some one. After lighting a cigaret and indulging in a few puffs, Nixon began:

"Bert Kerry, my partner, and I have just finished a rather bad session. You know how it goes. Our stories have lacked punch or news value. However, about a week ago a promising lead came up. It seems the Army had just acquired a new

blimp and it was to be assigned to Langley Field. The maiden voyage included in its itinerary a trip over Washington. This is always good for a story so the office notified us to hop down there and make it. The next morning, on inquiring at the operations office of the field, it was learned that we were none too soon. The initial flight was to be made that day. I explained our desires to Captain Springs, the commander of the blimp, and he phoned Washington procuring permission for us to accompany him.

"While I directed a working detail in the loading of our equipment aboard the gondola, Bert explained to the captain something about the theory of sound photography. The officer was very much interested in the recording lamp, attached to my camera, that transmits the sound impulse directly to the film. He also was impressed by the fact that the only connection between the recording amplifier and the camera is a light gage high tension cable.

"Finally the blimp was loaded. Those of us who were going along filed aboard and the ground crew ran the ship out of its hangar. I was set up in the foremost part of the gondola, commanding a full view of the whole works. Bert was crouched over his amplifier in the extreme end of the body. Our relative positions didn't matter as conversation would have been impossible, what with two Hispano-Suiza's revving up. A tiny light actuated by a relay indicated to my partner just when I was shooting.

"Captain Springs ordered the men to cast off. Up we went in a long, lazy spiral. Circling the field the ship climbed to an altitude of three thousand feet, dipped gracefully as she slid over old Fortress Munroe, then pointed her nose northwest hitting a bee-line right up Chesapeake Bay. It was a glorious day; the visibility was very high; a strong breeze blew southward. As we streaked along, motors droning a contented note, I amused myself with the panorama below me. Far to the right rapidly slipping out of sight was Cape Charles, terminus of the beautiful Del-Mar-Va peninsula.

"We were flying higher now and approaching the delta of the Rappahannock River. The air was quite bumpy. Suddenly the blimp veered sharply to the right as if to cross the bay. I couldn't reconcile this with the plotted course and looked inquiringly at Captain Springs. He seemed very much perturbed. Shedding his gantlets, he made his way to the pilot and took over the controls. He tugged desperately at them for a moment and then, with a futile gesture, cut the throttle. The roar of the motors changed to a staccato cough. Cupping his hands, he shouted to me:

" 'Guess we'll have to cancel our joy ride. Look at that rudder.'

"I followed his glance as he turned and looked upward. The rudder was askew and visibly jammed. Just at that moment a strong gust of wind twisted the damaged fin from one of its hinges. The fabric ripped off and a sharp corner of the exposed framework penetrated the gas bag. In dismay I looked at the commander.

" 'No danger,' he assured me. 'We'll send a man aloft and he'll fix the damage in a jiffy.'

"Boy, here was a picture! I could visualize the title: Daring Army Flyer Makes Repair In Mid-Air.

"Focusing on the chap who had volunteered, I photographed him as he made his perilous way up the shroud lines. Reaching the rudder, he worked like a fiend to rectify the trouble. Haste was important as the gas was flowing out of the hole in the bag. Finally he looked down at us, shrugged his shoulders in a hopeless fashion and retraced his way back to the gondola. By this time, due to the strong wind, we had drifted southward considerably and were in the vicinity of Dismal Swamp. Captain Springs was consulting the other officers; they seemed to agree on some point, then beckoned me to join them.

" 'We'll have to do some free ballooning,' the captain explained. 'In a little while I figure we will be over one of those

North Carolina tobacco fields and when we are I'll valve out the remaining gas. There is no use in trying to limp back to the home base as the ship will not respond to lateral control. Besides, a sudden change of wind might blow us out to sea and the chances of being salvaged off the Virginia Capes are not so good.'

"He was quite casual about the whole matter. On asking him if there would be any danger, he smiled sort of grimly but assured me that outside of a good bump we had an even chance of landing unscathed. I asked him to convey the news to Bert, who was peering anxiously toward us. Here was some more stuff. I decided to keep right on grinding and give the office something real to look at. A forced landing of a blimp right from the pilot's perch.

"Just outside of a little town, which I later identified as Murfreesboro, we spotted a clearing. The captain cut the motors and, with a grimace, pulled the rip cord. The ship settled decidedly. I could see a group of negro workers looking up at us. Abandoning whatever they had been doing, they dropped to their knees and crouched in terror of the big ship as it swooped down. At that, it must have seemed like an emissary of the devil to them; the flabby, half deflated envelop making it all the more incomprehensible.

"The camera was still going, taking advantage of all this business. The car grazed the treetops of a grove that bordered the field. I braced myself for the jolt and waved to Bert. He seemed plenty excited. We were scudding along in a crazy manner.

"Crrrrrraaaaaack! One corner of the gondola hit the ground; it careened and the right side motor prop was washed out. That is the one you see here, by the way. It was nerve wracking for a moment but finally the whole ship came to a grinding halt. The big bag, now entirely deflated, billowed down upon us, draping itself fantastically.

"None of us was hurt, and after ascertaining that we really were human beings, the negro workers helped pull us out of the wreckage. Captain Springs was swearing softly. He turned to us and said—

" 'Well, none of us is eligible for the Caterpillar Club yet.'

"On investigating, I found the camera intact. I was exultant. What a picture! My partner joined the group around the captain.

" 'How much damage do you estimate it is, Cap?' he asked.

" 'Oh, outside of that broken prop and a few struts, there isn't much to it,' the captain replied. 'However,' he added, 'I know the Government is going to be a little fussy about losing all that helium.'

" 'Helium!' ejaculated Bert. 'My God!'

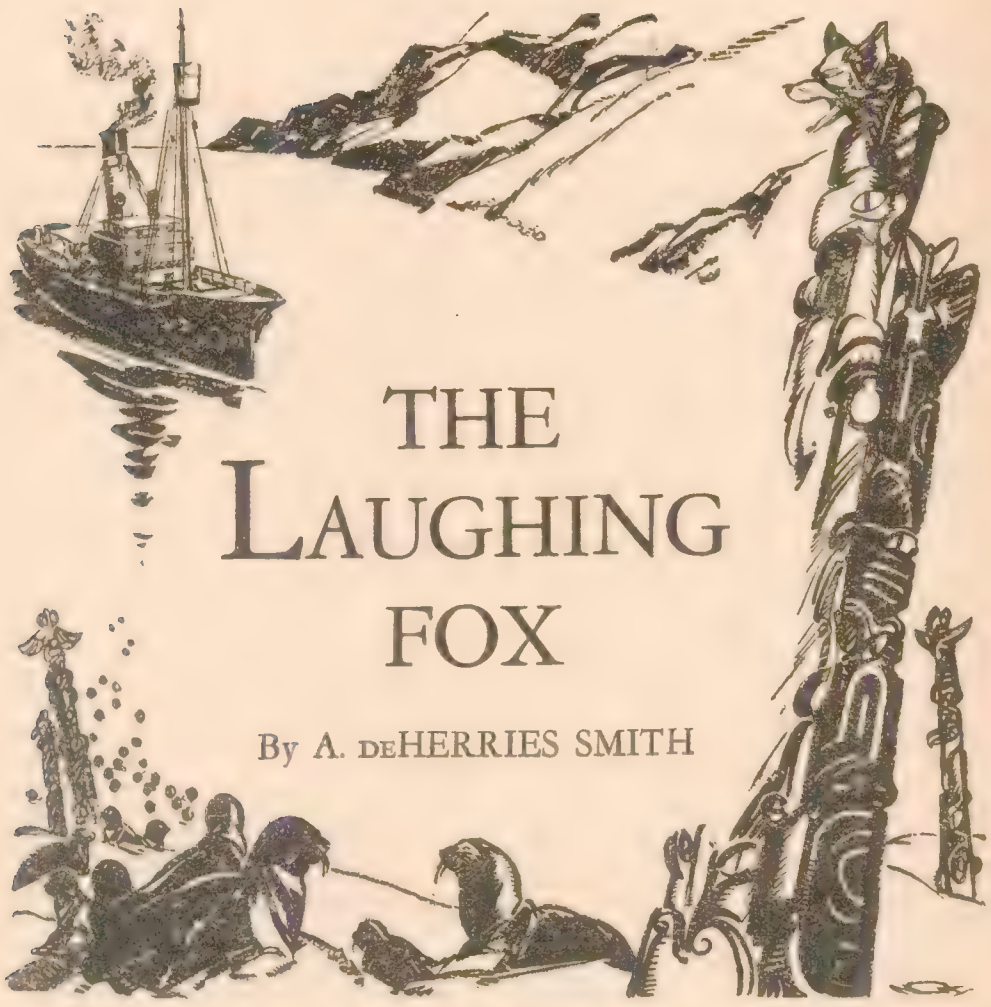
"I looked at him. He was pale.

" 'What's wrong, pal?' I asked. 'You look sick.'

" 'I am,' he groaned. 'I thought the bag was full of hydrogen, so back there when the rudder poked a hole in the envelop I cut the sound feed line to your camera, fearing the juice would ignite the gas.'

"When they brought me to I asked Captain Springs for that propeller as a souvenir." Nixon indicated the splintered relic. "Now do you know why I want it left as is?" He added, "Let it be a warning to all sound men."

A Story of the Seal Islands



THE LAUGHING FOX

By A. DEHERRIES SMITH

"WE CAN kill ten thousand swimmers, mebbe," a throaty voice came out of the cabin's gloom, "but what'll the other Fisheries patrol boats be doin' while we're at it? You're fulla hop."

Grunts of agreement came from the whalers and halibut fishermen squatted in the cabin overlooking the fog dappled Pacific. The men understood well enough that Captain Jack Redel of the *Caribou* was to die and that with his disappearance they would be both rich—and safe. Pete Kortgurd swore he had it all worked out. The mate of the *Caribou* would have to show them, though.

"I'm tellin' you saps that we can snaffel twenty thousand seals anyhow," Kortgurd rumbled aggressively. He jerked his great body upright, staring down at the circle of face blurs.

"Well, he oughta know," another fisher-

man put in. "Kortgurd's first mate on one of the Gov'ment boats, ain't he? If he's in with us an' he's got somethin' to shoot, you longshore sailors best flap your lugs."

"One feller got some sense an' guts anyhow," Kortgurd applauded. "Listen here. You all know the layout. The fur seal herds is migratin' from the winter feeding grounds along the Mexican coast and is headin' for the Pribylov Islands, in Alaska. The U. S. Coast Guard boats has the job of convoyin' 'em as far as the British Columbia line. Then the Canadian patrol boats takes hold of the thing an' sees that the seals gets through Canadian waters all right. They hands the swimmers over to another fleet of U. S. boats again at the Alaska boundary. From there on to the rookeries it's up to Uncle Sam to see that they gets through. All accordin' to the international sealing treaty. You're on to that?"

A chorus of grunts.

Kortgurd clumped across the cabin in his heavy sea boots, flung the door back and stared into the outside sunlight. The trademark of the sailor was stamped on his bulky frame, clothed in a rough sea jacket and serge trousers. Salty winds and the Pacific's cold rains had tanned his face a brick red, matching his hairy hands in hue. His face was marred by deeply set eyes; one gray, the other green. They were restless and suspicious, forever searching.

He stared for a long moment at the mist wreathed mountains and the glassy water. The bay was flecked by the white shapes of expectant gulls, circling and screaming behind an incoming halibut boat. His glance went to the battle gray shapes of the *Caribou* and her two sister ships of the Fisheries protective service. Kortgurd shot a contemptuous stream of tobacco juice in their direction and wheeled back.

"They got steam up," he announced, nodding out to where streamers of heavy smoke floated up from the yellow funnels. "Redel ordered us to be aboard by noon. Guess he figgers that the seal herds is nearly into Canadian waters. Well, what about it?"

"Sounds all right," a doubtful voice replied from the farthest corner. "The Indians got over five thousand seals last year along the B. C. coast while the herds was migratin'. We oughta do better nor a bunch of ruddy Siwashes."

"You fellers got any brains?" Kortgurd challenged, his voice heavy with scorn. "You know the law. The Indians are allowed to kill all they can from canoes with bows an' arrows an' spears. Old time treaty stuff. But the Gov'ment won't allow 'em to use guns or rifles . . . Well, we ain't Indians, are we? Ten bucks a shot for green seal hides in Vladivostok or Nagaski, an' no questions asked. Let that sink in."

Kortgurd glanced out of the open doorway and turned back into the cabin once more. He thrust a passage into the center of the group, talking fluently and convincingly. It was a case of "take it or leave it," and finally the other men agreed to his demands.

Five minutes later with his pal, Sturmer, at his heels, the Fisheries officer left the cabin. Making a roundabout passage through the dripping woods, they strode down over the moss covered rocks to where Port Pacific's collection of unpainted shacks nestled at the meeting of mountainside and water.

The men made various purchases at a waterfront store. Laden with parcels, they clumped along the slimy, wooden wharf, passed the *Sea Lion* and the *Bear*, and went up the *Caribou's* gangplank.

"You ain't any too soon," a red headed deckboy announced, laying down his polishing rag and grinning at the new arrivals. "The Old Man's been lookin' for you, Kortgurd."

"Get for'ard an' keep your yap shut," the mate ordered Sturmer. "An' you, poodle face, when you speak to the first officer aboard this barge, you use the word 'Mister', or mebbe you'll feel my sea boot. Where's the skipper?"

"In the pilot house, Mister," the youth

replied, a grin still crinkling up the corners of his wide mouth.

Kortgurd strode along the deck. His hand was on the knob of the wheelhouse door, but he did not twist it. He peered in through an open port. The mate's eyes went to Redel's sea cap stuck on the back of a fair, close cropped head. The captain's gaze was on a typewritten message that lay on the navigating table. His fingers were pinching reflectively at a bronzed cheek.

"Come aboard, sir," Kortgurd announced, banging his great fist on the door, as he opened it, and stepped into the wheelhouse. "Bennie said you wanted me."

"Yes—we're sailing," Redel answered in his low, clear voice, gray eyes on the other man. "Got the American *C.G. 332* on the wireless a few minutes ago," he added, pointing to the paper on the table. "The head of the herds is off Cape Flattery now. We'll take the swimmers over from the U. S. boats in the morning. Check up on the supplies and crew and we'll cast off."

"Very good, sir."

In spite of himself, Kortgurd stood for a moment, mentally appraising his chief. Redel was quite as large as he himself, a good ten years younger. Twenty-seven at the outside. Redel's piercing eyes seemed to bore right into the mate's being. As well, there was that about the Fisheries captain that told of unbounded energy and muscular youth.

As he turned away, Kortgurd assured himself that these things were no handicap to his plans. If Redel could climb out of the mess he had fixed up for him he'd be living up to his reputation on the coast, all right. Not much danger of that.

THE WHITE capped Olympic Mountains were thrusting their heads above the coast mists when Captain Redel stamped up the short companionway to the navigating bridge. The morning sun glinted on the smooth waters of Juan de Fuca Straits and on the glistening heads of ten thousand—a million—fur seals swimming determinedly north to their homes on the distant islands.

Behind him, dimly distant, were the rocky, timber clad shores of Vancouver Island. In front was the equally abrupt Washington coastline. Standing out to sea were a half dozen little vessels flying the stars and stripes.

The U. S. Coast Guard had brought the herds to the American-Canadian boundary. Now it was up to Redel to see that the seals passed through Canadian waters in safety and were handed over to the other American ships waiting at the Alaska line.

Redel paced the navigation bridge with short, quick strides, glancing from the crew lounging in the forward well deck to the American vessels and back again.

One of the men below nudged his companion and half nodded to the tall figure on the bridge. The captain wore a simple suit of brassbound blues, but it fitted his wide shoulders and narrow hips. Somehow that plain uniform seemed almost to confer the dignity of a battleship command on the Fisheries officer. The deckhands sensed that here was one born to command. Although Redel kept to himself his free and easy crew did not dislike him for it.

Whee-ee-e!

Redel's whistle brought Kortgurd's boots pounding along the deck. The captain nodded to the U. S. vessels and the swimming herds.

"About ship, an' get under way?" Kortgurd queried, eyes jumping in his eagerness to be off.

"Yes," Redel agreed, issuing curt sailing orders.

The mate saluted and disappeared. Shortly afterward a string of signal flags was broken out from the *Caribou's* peak. It was answered by the leading American vessel. Then the *Caribou*, the *Sea Lion* and the *Bear* swung about in wide arcs and commenced steaming slowly north.

The rugged coast of Vancouver Island rose higher and higher. The blue-green blurs of the forests on the mountainsides

began to take shape. Now and then a cluster of white houses ashore betokened an Indian or fishing village.

"Ah!" Redel exclaimed all at once, laying down the binoculars through which he had been peering. He gave the man at the wheel a low order.

"A damn shame," the captain growled to Kortgurd, behind him. "There's a bunch of Indians murdering seals over there by that village. However, I suppose as they're the coast's original inhabitants it's their right, more or less . . . Take her in close, Ole," he added to the sailor at the wheel.

In reply to the captain's nod Kortgurd clanged the indicator over from "slow" to "stop". Bells jangled in the engine room far below, and presently the captain and the mate were heading for the rocky coastline in a light boat engined by a kicker.

"Look those Indians over closely," Redel ordered his second-in-command. "Ottawa gave me the deuce last year because those white fishermen from Alert Bay got in on the herds. The devil of it is that you can hardly tell a Siwash from a white man, nowadays; they've got so much mixed blood in their veins."

Kortgurd grunted assent. There was a smile on his thick lips and his eyes glinted when they ranged the forests clothing the mountains, and the glassy water broken by that myriad of round, black heads.

Redel was able to see now that the narrow beach under the overhanging spruce trees was alive with seals. Thousands were swimming along the fringing rocks, seeking landing places where they might sun themselves and rest. Others were already ashore and flopping about.

The motorboat shot past a rocky point and all at once the peaceful scene was changed. In a narrow inlet a dozen or more of the high prowed native canoes were dodging about, the crews beating the water with their carved paddles and herding the seals up on to the rocks.

Other Indians were clubbing and spearing the swimmers. Exultant howls filled the damp air, punctuated now and then by an old bull's roar, or a pup's plaintive bleating. On the rocks red armed women were skinning the dead animals while excited, yelling boys were firing with bows and arrows at the seals close inshore.

The boat's nose grounded and Redel sprang ashore. He carefully examined the natives and their equipment. Surly always, the squat, coppery faced Siwashes offered no greetings and looked for none. The men ignored the Fisheries officer.

Some of the youths were less complacent, however. They wanted to exhibit their courage before the admiring eyes of the giggling, black haired *klootchmin*, by spitting their contempt of the white man and strutting arrogantly in his path.

The captain took little notice of the young braves; not until one youth stood directly in his way brandishing one of the long, narrow bladed paddles.

The Indian was clucking something in the Klingat tongue; words that came from his throat with hardly a lip movement. He pointed to the red and black painted designs on the paddle blade; to the Whale totem, the Winged Fox and the Raven. His meaning was clear. This was the land of the Klingats. Here they were protected by their mystic totems and the white man was a trespasser at his own peril.

For a long, breathless moment the two men faced each other on the rocks. At length the fanatical brown eyes fell before the steady gray ones, the threatening paddle dropped and the white man went on with the job in hand.

REDEL was thorough. He searched the fish tainted tents under the trees for weapons and ordered all the canoes ashore for the same purpose. Satisfied at length that the Indians were killing according to their treaty rights and were not using firearms, he once more made his way over the rocks, slippery with blood, and took his place in the boat.

"Just like a bunch of boys swimming about," the captain said, low toned, disgusted, when the boat commenced re-threading a passage through the seals.

"Guess I'm soft that way," he added, "but it seems cold blooded to slaughter the poor brutes like this."

Kortgurd agreed thickly, watching the swimmers' glistening heads and brown eyes. He thought:

"It'll sure be a crime when Langrum turns the machine gun loose on 'em. We'll make more in a day killin' them than we would in the Fisheries service in years. I'm chicken-livered, too. Oh, yeah!"

That evening three white men were caught, literally red handed, with a few dozen seal hides in their halibut schooner. They were landed and locked up at Clayoquot. Yet others were arrested at Nootka, and off Bella Bella. By the time the *Caribou* and her consorts had steamed abreast of the Queen Charlotte Islands, the number of captured poachers ran into two figures.

"That's not all of it, either," Redel told himself, his thoughts on the million islands that dotted the deeply indented coastline. "I'd need fifty patrol boats to make a job of this," he growled as his eyes went seaward to the two specks that were the *Sea Lion* and the *Bear*.

The captain well knew that the annual migration of the seal herds would be played up by the coast newspapers and that the fishermen's depredations would be given prominence. No matter how well he carried out his difficult task there would be complaints and investigations.

"I'm going to turn in," Redel informed Kortgurd when the night mists were commencing to blur the coastline. "You carry on and I'll take the bridge later. Got to get some sleep. The head of the herds should be crossing into Alaskan waters sometime tomorrow and I want to be on deck to turn them over to the U. S. Coast Guards."

"Right, sir," the mate responded briskly, forcing back the grin that arose to his lips. "Good night, sir."

"Good night."

"Well, ain't that just the dope the doctor ordered?" Kortgurd chuckled, turning about to gaze down into Sturmer's narrow face and weasel eyes.

"Come out lucky, you an' me bein' on watch together." The helmsman laughed. "Goin' to pull it off tonight?"

"Right now," the mate rapped out. "He gets the point as well as us,' he added, nodding in the direction of the retreating footsteps. "The seal herds'll be played out after their long swim across the Hecate Straits. They'll perch on them islands off Prince Rupert in thousands. Whinney an' Markle an' the rest of 'em are wised up to start killin' there. We gotta fix Redel tonight."

"Reckon so," Sturmer agreed, a trifle uneasily. "Easy on the rough stuff though. What you goin' to do first?"

"Get this into your thick head," the mate ordered, leaning down to peer into the little man's shifty eyes. "I'm off to the wireless shack now. Goin' to order the *Sea Lion* an' the *Bear* back to the tail of the herds. Get 'em out of the way, see? Then the telegraph operator gets it on the ear, an' wakes up to find he's tied. Redel gets the same medicine, an' we'll lock the crew in the focsle. After that we go to meet the boys. How does that listen?"

"Pretty good," Sturmer agreed. "But watch Redel; he's no baby."

"You leave that to your uncle," Kortgurd returned with heavy jocularity. "Hold her on this course until I come back. S'long."

The mate slid out of his heavy sea jacket, produced the flat black shape of an automatic revolver, grinned at the helmsman, and stepped out into the night.

The *Caribou* was traveling at quarter speed and her bows cleaved the oily Pacific rolls with a soothing swish. Fog balls rolled across the ocean's bosom, propelled by a light breeze. The moon was overcast by slow moving clouds.

The mate noted all these things. He glanced seaward until the distant navigation lights on the other Fisheries boats came into his line of vision. The man grunted his satisfaction, sniffing the damp, salty air.

Kortgurd listened to the engines' subdued thrumming, and softfooted along the

wet deck toward the wireless room. A glance through the light flooded port revealed the youthful operator at his ease. Brand's feet were cocked up on the desk as he perused a tattered magazine. A cigaret hung between his lips.

Kortgurd shoved the hand holding the automatic into a trousers pocket and thrust the door open, without the customary knock.

"Hey!" the operator challenged. "What the hell's the idea—"

"Lay off the gab, sonny," the mate put in. "Important message from the Old Man. Here—let it go."

He spread a sheet of paper on the table beside the telegraph instrument, smiling to himself as Brand pitched the magazine on to his bunk and started the sending key. The message clicked out smoothly:

TO CAPTAINS OF *SEA LION* AND *BEAR*: ORDERS FROM PATROL LEADER. ABOUT SHIP AND BRING IN THE REAR OF THE HERDS. FOLLOW UNTIL ALL ANIMALS ARE OVER THE ALASKA LINE. REPEAT.

—REDEL

"They repeated O.K. You don't expect me to type it out, do you?" the operator queried lazily, a few moments later, again reaching for the magazine.

"Don't want nothin' at all from—"

Crash!

The mate smashed the sending key with one blow, grinning across the table at the suddenly white faced youngster.

"You'll be all right, sonny," Kortgurd said. "No yap now. Goin' to fix you some. Shut up! Stick out your hands."

He trussed the boy's legs and arms with some cord taken from his pocket, tied a gag in his mouth, switched off the light and once more stepped out on deck.

Kortgurd's rubber boots made little sound as he padded along the deck and down the forecastle companionway. The sleepers' deep breathing assured him that all was well. Kortgurd fastened the forecastle doors. The doors leading to the engine room were fixed in the same fashion. A minute later the mate was cautiously elevating his face level with the bottom of the captain's port.

REDEL, half dressed, was stretched on his bunk, one long leg trailing overside. The watching man saw that the captain was breathing deeply. Kortgurd's satisfied eyes went from Redel's face to his broad chest and arms. The mate was scarcely able to restrain a laugh at what he saw.

He knew that Redel had come to the Fisheries service after seven years in the Royal Canadian navy. He had also heard it said that some Chinese in Esquimalt had used his tattooing needle on the youthful sailor to good effect, but he had never expected to see what Redel's shirt usually covered so carefully.

"Jumping Judas!" the mate muttered to himself. "Snakes, ships, wolves, women an' wine! He's got 'em all. Must have give that chink a month's pay to tattoo that mess on his carcass."

Kortgurd's thick fingers were on the door knob, when he paused.

"Suppose he wakes up before I hang one on him?" the big man speculated. "Better not take any chances."

He slipped aft, took a sailor's red and white striped sweater off a line of clothes, and crowded into the mist soaked garment. Then with a woolen storm cap pulled well down over his face he once more headed for the cabin door.

"Damn you!"

A fleeting black shape darted between Kortgurd's legs just as he was about to open the door. He cursed the ship's cat under his breath and, with fingers not quite so steady now, twisted the handle and slid the door back on well oiled hinges.

One leg was over the coaming and the second was following when the cat appeared again. It sprang through the door and stood in the middle of the cabin floor, looking back at him.

Swearing softly, the mate stepped forward. One inviting hand was extended,

the other held the automatic ready. The cat mewed and moved off.

In a sudden fury Kortgurd swept down with the automatic. The cat jumped aside nimbly. The mate slashed out again, just as a second leap carried the cat on to Redel's leg. It clawed wildly to regain its balance.

"Hell!"

The claws brought Redel out of his sleep with a jerk. He threw himself up on one elbow—just in time to see Kortgurd rush at him across the cabin.

Quick as a flash the captain threw himself across the floor, fastened his arms about the mate's legs and sent the other man spinning. As he fell Kortgurd struck out and missed.

Kortgurd was no novice at rough and tumble fighting. As well, he knew that if he failed now, he would be liable to serious charges. Stifling the oath that came to his lips at the captain's first blow, Kortgurd rolled over and managed to get astride the other man.

The captain's second blow shook him loose. In a welter of fists the two rolled across the floor, until they struck the cabin wall. Redel saw that the other man was making no attempt to hit back. He suddenly sensed the reason when Kortgurd's armed hand was thrown into relief against a shaded electric light.

Using every muscle at his command, Redel tore himself free of his antagonist and sent in a withering blow to the base of Kortgurd's skull. It connected just as the heavy automatic barrel crashed down on the captain's head.

Wheezing and gasping, Kortgurd stumbled to his feet to stare at the red stream trickling down over Redel's forehead. The mate felt his stinging neck, glared at the cat, which was calmly licking its coat, and reached into his pocket for a cord.

"My God, you ain't killed—?"

Kortgurd jumped about to find himself staring at Sturmer's narrow face, white with fear.

"No— What the hell's the matter with you?" the big man snarled.

"They're tryin' to get out of the engine room. Time for the relief to take over," Sturmer whispered from the door. "Batterin' at the hatch like the very devil."

"All right."

Kortgurd dropped the cord, leaped out of the cabin, ran along the deck and listened at the engine room hatchway.

A muffled and angry voice was calling something through the door. Fists were pounding on it. Kortgurd listened carefully, placing the position of the voice's owner.

"Moss!" Kortgurd called. "If you want a bullet in the guts keep on hollerin'. I'm in command of this hooker now. Keep your engines turning at a quarter an' stand by."

"Go to hell!"

Kortgurd fired through the door three times. No more calls came. Feet sounded in quick retreat but the engines continued to rumble. Moss seemed to be cowed.

Kortgurd wheeled about and went back to the cabin. He glanced at Redel's still body, eyes narrowed. He was reaching for the cord on the floor when he heard a boat falls creaking. It came to him that Sturmer thought he had shot Moss and was trying to get away.

"This is a hangin' job," Sturmer whined, when Kortgurd lumbered across the deck to where the little man was making frantic endeavors to lower the power boat.

"It will be, if you don't shut your trap," the big man threatened, towering over Sturmer in the gloom. "You're a cowardly swine, if ever there was one. Nothin' to be scared about anyhow. None of the crew can get out an' Moss is plumb scared. Cut out the sniveling an' get back to the wheelhouse, or I'll kick your ribs in. Hold her on a course, west by north. Go on—move!"

Kortgurd went back to the captain's cabin to find that Redel was still stretched on the floor, white and motionless. He picked up the cord once more, only to drop it again, when his eyes lighted on the cupboard above the captain's bunk. A

moment later he had stepped back across Redel's body, carrying two unopened bottles of navy rum.

Redel could wait, the mate told himself. Anyhow, he had a revolver and the ship's rifles were chained in the gun rack . . .

Another brilliant thought occurred to Kortgurd when he glanced at the six Lee-Enfield rifles. He fumbled in Redel's pocket until he found his keys, thrust them well down in his own pocket and stepped out on to the deck. There was only one weapon available on the ship now—and he had it.

Kortgurd was whistling while the *Caribou* steamed on through the night. The other Fisheries service boats were out of the way now, and he had clear sailing. The gang would be at Kittakattla, wiping out the seals. Why, with that machine gun Langrum had they could slaughter a thousand swimmers in a day!

If the boys had hired a big bunch of Siwashes to do the skinning, they could load the schooner with seal hides in a hurry, sink the *Caribou* and her crew, and be out at sea in no time at all. On to Japan! A sack of dollars would go a long way there.

"NO, I DON'T want no more of it," Sturmer objected, thrusting aside Kortgurd's hand, and slopping the rum to the wheelhouse floor. "You best cut it out too," the little man warned. "You ve had enough, an' what about Redel? You ain't tied him up yet."

"That's right," Kortgurd agreed thickly. "Mebbe the skipper'd like his rum issue. I'll look him over."

Kortgurd shook the bottle, picked up his revolver and lurched out into the night. A blast of fog laden air struck him, clearing his head, and by the time he reached the door of Redel's cabin he was himself again.

Kortgurd stood in the light filled doorway, mouth drooping in surprise. Redel was on his feet, holding to the bunk, and staring across at him.

"You murdering dog!" the captain said thickly. "Might have known it was you. By Jupiter, I'll—"

Redel's crazy rush cut off the words. Kortgurd swore, and the rum bottle whirled across the cabin, crashed against the wall and littered the floor with broken glass.

Redel ducked his head to miss the bottle, and stumbled through the doorway. Kortgurd lashed out a punch with his right fist that sent Redel sprawling along the slippery deck. Then a yellow flame stabbed the night's gloom. A second shot pealed out a moment later.

"He's crazy with hooch," Redel muttered, picking himself up. "I'll get a wrench out of the engine room and knock the brute cold."

A third shot added wings to the captain's flight. He raced along the deck until he reached the engine room hatchway, only to find it was locked. Yells sounded from behind it, answered by a voice from the wheel house, when Sturmer appeared.

Whee-ee-e! A bullet zipped past Redel's head and whined off into the night. Kortgurd yelled.

Instantaneously Redel made his decision. He knew he was trapped. There was nothing for it but to dive overboard and thrust to luck that the *Caribou* was close inshore.

As he ran along the deck another thought occurred to him. Without halting, he jerked one of the fire buckets out of the rack alongside the funnel and flung it overside. The bucket hit the water with a splash.

One jump carried Redel to the rail. He gripped the davits, swung up, and a moment later was sprawled in the shore boat, listening to the approaching feet.

The boots stopped and voices sounded almost directly below where Redel lay. Kortgurd laughed and said:

"I heard him hit the water. Get a flashlight an' I'll take a crack at him."

Sturmer's squeaky tones protested. The mate laughed again, said something in a low undertone and the voices faded

away. Redel pulled a lifebelt under his head, covered himself with the lug sail and settled himself to await the dawn.

Piping gulls heralded the new day. The sun filtered down at length and Redel saw that the slow moving *Caribou* was nosing along under sheer mountain walls, densely timbered as far as the eye could see. The glassy water was speckled with the seals' dark heads.

After a time voices sounded from the shores of the foggy inlet up which the patrol boat was steaming. Shapes grew in the mist. Men were clustered on the rocks. There were the usual ramshackle Indian shelters and beyond them lines of totem poles; each blazoned with the hideous figures of Siwash spirits and the mythical heroes of the past.

"Kittakattla Island!" the captain exclaimed.

He waited grimly until the *Caribou* lost way, slid up to the rocks and was made fast to the trees ashore. A mob of Indians poured aboard, voices raised in question. Above this the clearer tones of the white men sounded.

Taking full advantage of the excitement, the fog and the half light, Redel slipped down the dangling boat falls, and plunged knee deep through the water, jumping from rock to rock. A few minutes later he was hidden by the salmonberry bushes at the edge of the timber.

The sun rose higher and higher, dispelling the mists and outlining the scene below. It threw the carved monstrosities on the totem poles into relief against the glassy water; the obese winged whales, the doubled headed eagles, the grinning foxes, and leering, half human masks. Thick wood smoke trickled up from the cabins. Indians hurried along the rough wooden verandas, for once apparently shaken out of their surly calm.

Redel could see that a sentry had been posted on the *Caribou*. The man appeared on her upper decks every so often, as he passed from the forecastle door to the engine room hatchway. Otherwise the patrol boat was lifeless.

The smooth water under the cliffs was filled with the seals' heads as they swam for the shore and slithered up on the rocks to rest. Kortgurd, Sturmer and some of the other white men were standing in a group close to the *Caribou*, laughing and talking in loud voices. Redel sensed that they were waiting for the Indians to return before resuming the slaughter. That some had been killed was evinced by the mounds of pelts and the reddened rocks.

The Fisheries service captain swore vividly, and made as though to rise, only to sink down again. His eyes took in the rows of totem poles before the Indian houses and they stabbed his mind with a new and bitter thought.

He knew well enough that the Siwashes regarded all authority with dislike, and particularly that of the Fisheries officials. The coast Indians lived on the things that swam in the Pacific, and ingrained in their natures was a belief that all the fish and fur of the sea belonged to them. Redel could understand why they resented the white man's government framing rules and regulations for their guidance. "I'm in a real fix this time," Redel muttered to himself. "If I had to deal with the white men alone I might be able to manage it, but these Siwashes regard me as their especial enemy."

He was soaked with the drippings from the branches overhead. Another half hour dragged. Then the Indians began to leave the houses. Throaty voices sputtering Chinook and Klingat reached Redel's ears. Kortgurd's thick tones were added as he called to the Siwashes.

A SUDDEN volley of shots sent Redel flat in the ferns and undergrowth. With eyes hard and lips tight he wormed his way forward a few paces, parted the brush and looked out. A man armed with a light Lewis machine gun was lying on the rocks about fifty yards distant, pouring lead into the advancing waves of seals.

Redel saw the animals on the rocks crumple up. The volleys halted the migration for a moment. Then again the

rocks under Kittakattla's dripping trees changed from red to black with the shapes of the new arrivals.

"Nothing will stop the seals landing," Redel told himself. "They're played out after that long swim across the Hecate Straits. Nothing will stop them. The poachers have killed hundreds with that gun already. By God, I've got to do something!"

A yell from the rocks rose above the medley of sounds and with it the machine gun ceased its chatter. Redel saw Kortgurd swinging his arms violently and knew the reason for it. The Indians were excited by the advent of the Government boat to help instead of hinder them, and there was a danger that some of the natives might be killed as well as the seals.

Fresh shouts sounded from below when Kortgurd and his companions commenced reaping a devil's harvest with knives and clubs. Even the flat faced Indians became infected. Their howls rang out above the thudding of the clubs on the seals' heads, the bawling of the pups for their mothers and the shrill cries of the Siwash children.

Redel saw Kortgurd run along the rocks followed by an infuriated bull seal. Then Sturmer took a hand. He beat the maddened animal on the hind flippers until the brute was forced to turn. Kortgurd jumped about, swung his club and another victim was added to the tally. He called to an Indian woman to skin the animal and ran off after another seal. The other white men were equally active. As the mound of fur pelts grew on the rocks, and the fat, naked bodies were rolled into the sea, their mirth grew and grew.

Up under the trees the machine gunner, Langrum, lay on the ferns, the neglected gun beside him. He rolled cigaret after cigaret, calmly watching the scene below.

The glassy water was still filled with the seals' bobbing heads—thousands of them, swimming directly toward the island of doom. Despite the pandemonium on the rocks they came on steadily. Here on Kittakattla their forbears had rested for generations, and here the herds would land until the end of time.

As though he walked in a daze, Redel found himself on his feet and thrusting a passage through the brush, beneath the wet trees, directly toward where Langrum lay beside the machine gun.

"That's the only way out of it," he told himself, as he crept through the timber. "I've got to get that machine gun. Then, by Christopher, I'll wipe out that—"

The half spoken words ceased abruptly. Redel found himself peering out through the brush screen at the machine gun's black barrel and the circular pan that fed the nickel nosed bullets to it.

"Now!" Redel muttered.

For half a dozen feet he plunged down the rocks, gathered himself and leaped for Langrum's back. As he leaped Redel was conscious of Langrum's twisted shoulder and the whites of his eyes turned upward.

There came a crash. Redel's fingers gripped the machine gun as one shoulder struck the rocks and his left hand seized Langrum.

The machine gunner struck out, felt himself sliding, and buried his fingers in Redel's coat. Hampered by the gun, Redel made an effort to throw himself on top of Langrum. He succeeded in doing so but the effect was not what he expected. The two rolled down the slippery rocks, over and over.

A babel of sounds broke upon Redel's ears. He was conscious of bodies between him and the sunlight, of racing legs, of curses and throaty Indian shouts. Fists struck him; hands tore at his body, ripping his coat. He was pried loose from Langrum and jerked to his feet.

"It's Redel! Let me get at him! Make way there!"

Kortgurd's booming voice cut through the medley of sounds. A fist shot out and landed against Redel's head. He stumbled, but hands gripped him. Redel threw himself away from the clutching fingers, felt his coat tear, and a moment later, when the cold air struck his sweating body, sensed that the shirt hung in tatters on his shoulders.

Something wet and warm was trickling down his face and falling on his shoulder. His breath came in gasping stabs, every muscle in agony. Another fist crashed against his cheek, sending him staggering backward—just in time to save his head from a club that whizzed through the air.

Kortgurd's face loomed up in Redel's vision. There was no time, no room to swing the Lewis. Redel's hand gripped the gun near the muzzle. He jabbed upward violently and saw a red smudge replace the man's features. The mate dropped.

"Rush him!" a hoarse voice called. "Rush him, fellers!"

"*E'lo! A'yaz masa 'chil*" came a shout, in throaty, clucking Chinook.

Right behind the call a thick shouldered Indian, gray hair falling down over his coppery face, thrust a passage through the ring of white men, waving his withered arms in authority.

"No! Very bad!" Redel dazedly translated the Chinook words in his mind.

"What the devil's coming off now?" he asked himself.

Kiyu, tribal chief of the Kittakattlas, was making a speech, that much was plain. Using his throat after the Siwash manner, and hardly moving his lips, the old man was pouring out a torrent of words, one yellow hand pointed at the Fisheries officer.

Redel wiped the sweat out of his eyes to behold a strange scene. A dozen or more paces distant, the white men, swearing and pleading by turns, were huddled together, faced by a mob of Indians armed with clubs and skinning knives.

Closer was Kiyu. The old man stood before Redel still mouthing a stream of Siwash that he was unable to pick up, pointing from the captain to the hideous carvings on the totem poles and back again.

"*Talapos! Talapos!*" The Indian chief called.

"*Talapos!*" he clucked again. Perceiving that Redel's mind was still blank, he jabbed one scrawny finger at the tattooing on the Fisheries man's chest, gesturing at the totem poles with the other hand.

The captain's eyes followed the chief's gesture, and finally made out the carved shape of a huge, wide jawed fox that adorned the top of the totem pole before the largest cabin.

Sudden enlightenment flooded over Redel. That Chinese-Siwash halfcaste had covered his chest with the symbols inherited from his Indian mother. He was marked with the Laughing Fox, the chief's tribal totem.

"Jupiter! That's it," Redel thought, suppressing the grin that tried to play about his lips. "By the gods of war I'm a blood brother of this outfit! I've got their damn sign on my hide and I belong to the totem of the Laughing Fox!"

He addressed the chief and his men.

"You have spoken a true word. I too am of the Fox totem. You are my brothers." Redel threw the ragged shirt clear of his chest. "*Tloos.* It is good. But I am also of the Government and the Kittakattlas have wrought much evil. *Ya'ka kopet.* It is finished. There will be no more killing. I will make a strong talk that you may not be punished."

As Redel strode toward them the group of white men milled back in indecision, half inclined to rush the captain, but conscious of the chief's power.

"Now, you murdering swine!" Redel challenged, when he reached the fishermen. "I've got a machine gun here; it's loaded; and I know how to use it. I'll send you down to hell, full of hot lead, if you're not aboard the *Caribou* in three minutes. Pick up Kortgurd and carry him aboard. Move now!"

When Redel threw the machine gun forward there was no hesitation. Half dragging, half carrying Kortgurd's limp form, the poachers scrambled down toward the patrol boat.

As the *Caribou's* engines rumbled Redel's eyes swept the shore. The black heads of the swimmers still bobbed toward the island, but as the patrol boat turned he saw the first of the rested seals slither down into the water and resume their long journey to the northern islands.

Two Rounds

A Story of India

By GANPAT

"DAMN!" said the commanding officer of the Black Belts feelingly, as he reached across the table for his pipe.

"I've said that several times, sir," remarked Major Smallwood. "It's the third theft in our lines in the last month. If only we could catch the blighter—"

Colonel Browne, the C.O, looked reflectively through the tent door at the glaring sunlit camp without, set under the frowning hills at the outer edge of Waziristan, which lies under the Afghan border. It is notoriously difficult to prevent petty thievery in a large camp where, besides the troops, there are large numbers of civilian laborers and employees under no military discipline. Wana, where this story began—a story that finished, if it is yet finished, hundreds of miles away in the Swat country—is such a camp.

Like all the northwest borderland of India, Swat is inhabited by Pathans—cheerful, laughing souls with no regard for law and order, but with much of primitive man's belief that might is more like to be right than is mere fluent talk. They do not therefore have flag days for the sup-

port of the League of Nations, but spend such money as they can save on the purchase of rifles. Of late years the Indian government has been endeavoring to promote the spread of law and order in this backward portion of the Indian Empire by the old Roman, and later Scots, method of opening up the country by making roads. Hence the existence of Wana.

"I should have a search of my company lines if I were you," said the C.O, lighting his pipe. "A wrist watch is an easy thing to hide. But if the thief is in the company, the search may frighten him."

"If he's there," answered Smallwood without enthusiasm.

He disliked the idea of searching his own men's kits, for like most officers of Indian regiments he believed very firmly in the men who followed him—in his case stout hearted, laughing Khuttacks of the Kohat district, and dour Yusufzais of Mardan and Swat beyond Peshawar where the border villages lie under the gaunt hills and the raiding gangs still sweep down from the tribal country that as yet lies void of roads—an Alsatia wherein the murderer from the settled districts finds ready shelter and where only the presence of the troops insures the would-be peaceful villager the chance to reap what he has sown.

"A search is a good idea," remarked the big *subadar*, the senior Indian officer of the company, as Smallwood emerged from the office. "But we shall find nothing. Even if the thief be one of ours, the son of a shameless parentage will have hidden the watch safely—" He broke off; the soldier has a peculiar horror of theft which, possibly owing to the communal life he has to lead, he regards as one of the more disgraceful crimes.

Smallwood proceeded to search methodically, platoon by platoon, a thoroughly distasteful task that he hated more and more as man after man opened up his kit. The professional soldier has human feelings; he has his little dreams; and the possessions stowed away in his kit bag or in the cheap, gaudy tin trunk which the Indian loves mean as much to him as do the household gods to the dweller of Balham or Surbiton.

Smallwood felt literally uncomfortable as he hunted through the tumbled heaps of mufti—the Indian soldier wears mufti always except when actually on parade—the embroidered waistcoats and the gold threaded turbans; the odd scraps of finery or cheap jewelry bought for the home folk in anticipation of leave; here and there treasured photos and tattered books in Arabic characters, thumbed almost to pieces from which word by word, almost letter by letter, the owners read aloud to entertain comrades even less literate than themselves during the long, dark winter evenings when the gates were closed and the sentries stood tensely alert, peering out into the murk for sign of hostile figures of raider or rifle thief.

As the search proceeded, feeling very much as any decent man would feel if compelled to ransack a woman's chest of drawers, Smallwood cursed the unknown thief from the bottom of his heart. But he was a conscientious soul; he had decided on a search and he would carry it through to the bitter end.

He breathed a sigh of relief as he finished with the second of his Khuttack platoons, whom he loved even more than the others of his company, and passed on to the tents of the Yusufzais who are of different breed—more silent men who laugh little and do not dance. They take life somewhat seriously, whereas the Khuttack takes nothing seriously from viceroys downward and merely shrieks with ribald laughter if you mention politicians or democratic leaders.

The search of that platoon was half finished when Smallwood's fingers struck something cold and hard in the flap of a box lid and he almost gasped as he looked at Sepoy Muhammad Ali, the owner, an old soldier of blameless character who was even that week to leave for his distant home on well earned pension. It was not the missing wrist watch of Sepoy Akhmad Gul—it was something worse: two rounds of government rifle ammunition!

Only those who know the Indian border can appreciate what that means—the border whose code demands that insults be settled in life blood, and where the man who does not so settle them will be spat upon by the women of his house, even though the revenge they demand will mean perhaps his hanging at the hands of an alien law, which does not recognize the sacredness of the blood feud. Hidden rounds of ammunition conjure up pictures of swift impending murder. . .

Smallwood balanced the telltale cartridges in his hand and looked at the Yusufzai sepoy in a silence that could be felt.

"Somebody has done this thing to blacken my face," said Muhammad Ali quickly in guttural Pushtu as his thoughts sped away to his little towered house in the Swat hills, where his wife waited for his coming. In three days he should have been on the road home, and now? It would be six months in jail for sure and the loss of his pension as well.

The possession of illicit ammunition may lead a man to avenge a fancied wrong in a moment of frenzy born of brooding. The army code, seeking to protect men from worse things, punishes heavily the stealing or concealment of ammunition.

"Hell!" muttered Smallwood to himself as he looked from the man to the cartridges, and back again.

They were old rounds, dated some years before; none such as were now being issued. And the Indian border is full of government ammunition; the Mahsuds' and Wazirs', the Afridis' and Orakzais' belts are crammed with it, trophies of the fights in the early post-war days when the débris of the regular Indian army, accustomed to fight only against half trained Turks or Germans, suddenly found itself pitted once more against the natural guerrilla fighters of the Indian border, men who could shoot with the rifle.

Too, there was unlimited English ammunition of government pattern from Afghanistan where Amanullah, trying to force so-called civilization on a people unfitted and unwilling for it, had been cast forth and chaos had reigned. Doubtless Muhammad Ali had found the rounds lying out somewhere. But why on earth had he not handed them in to his platoon commander?—he was an old soldier, well aware of the strict orders on the subject.

The offense was obvious; the offender caught, so to speak, red handed. Smallwood hesitated a fraction of a second and then took the only possible course. Muhammad Ali departed stolidly in the direction of the guardroom in the charge of a file of men, and Smallwood wearily continued his search, thankful only that at the end of it there was no trace of the stolen watch.

COLONEL BROWNE considered Muhammad Ali next morning when the Yusufzai was marched into the orderly room. His memory went back to a similar cold, sunlit morning ten years before, not fifty miles away. There had been some bickering in progress and his company of the Black Belts were contesting the possession of a hill. It had been seized by night, and when day broke the Mahsud Wazirs had realized they had been forestalled and were consequently angry.

Browne remembered well the hours that followed—they stood out as "sticky" even in his memory which enshrined many such moments. The Mahsud had come in with the short, triangular stabbing dagger under a hail of carefully directed lead. Browne's company had had to fight hand to hand as hard as they had ever fought, before they finally beat off the last of those determined attacks. And one of the most salient memories of that fight was that of Muhammad Ali doggedly clinging to his post among some boulders, firing coolly, methodically, despite the bullets slashing about him. And now— Oh, damn the fellow! Why on earth had he been such a fool?

"No, sahib," said Muhammad Ali in answer to Browne's interrogation. "Am

I one who would hide or steal ammunition? Do I not know all the orders? Have I not served twelve years in the Black Belts? Some one else has done this for enmity to me."

Innocence emanated from him as he stood upright and soldierly: neatly tied turban above his oiled love locks, spotless khaki and polished leather sandals, gay medal ribbons and bright silver buttons.

"But it was your box, Muhammad Ali," remonstrated Browne. "You yourself opened it with the key on the string round your neck. Why did you hide the rounds? Tell me the truth."

The case seemed complete enough; but any one who deals with Orientals knows the commoness of skillfully trumped up cases—even to murders complete with corpse and witnesses. Still, in this matter there seemed no room for doubt.

Offended honor looked back blankly from the Yusufzai's green eyes at the uncomprehending person who sat before him. He had made his protest and there was nothing more to add, no matter what injustice should follow. Silence reigned in the office as Browne and the prisoner gazed at each other. The *subadar* major, an alert Punjabi Mohammedan, waited for judgement. Surely there would be a court-martial; Black Belt discipline was as strict now as it had been in the days when they were first raised by the famous men who made Sind a land of peace ninety years ago. And, because of that discipline, the border tribes feared them in war. The escort stared straight before them like trim khaki statues and Smallwood cursed the thief who had caused this mess.

"Only last week I filled out your pension papers," remarked Browne. "And now—"

He broke off, reflectively weighing things up. He could think of no one in the regiment whom Muhammad Ali might want to kill. And moreover, in Wana, where any day might mean fighting with those who objected to the progress of the roads, every sepoy carried his hundred rounds at all times. Why, therefore, even if there were a quarrel, risk concealing a couple of extra rounds? Those two rounds were, in all probability, for some private business in Muhammad Ali's own country, among his own wild hills. Yes, that must be the solution . . .

Once again Browne felt the weight of responsibility, the knowledge of his own finiteness and limitations which comes often to any thinking man who wields power, who has the lives of others in his keeping, who has to act and not merely to talk. If he did not punish Muhammad Ali, it might be taken as a precedent; some one else would do the same for a worse purpose closer at hand. And the end of that—Browne had seen it before—would be an unsightly corpse or two in barrack room or tent, and a subsequent hanging. Two or three lives wasted perhaps, because, struggling to be just, he had been sentimental over an old soldier.

There was still silence in the orderly room. Smallwood shifted on his feet and the adjutant smothered a cough.

"You've earned a court-martial—" Browne was speaking again—"but instead of that I'll overlook it." He tore up the charge sheet which Smallwood had laid before him. "You can go on pension tomorrow as promised." He broke from Pushtu into English.

"Push him off on the down convoy in the morning, Smallwood, and for heaven's sake see he doesn't get into any more trouble." His glance swept round the room and he spoke in Hindustani to the *subadar* major for the benefit of every one who was listening inside the tent and outside. "Tell the regiment, *bahadur*, that this is a special case. I'll be doubly strict on any one else caught doing the same thing."

The *bahadur* saluted. He had known Browne for twenty-eight years. God help any foolish sepoy who took Muhammad Ali's case as a precedent permitting imitation!

"Salute!" barked the Pathan sergeant and Muhammad Ali and his escort saluted smartly, turned right, and filed out of the tent.

"Senile sentimentality on my part, I

suppose—typical example of the mental deterioration the Indian army officer is supposed to achieve, according to the journalists." Browne laughed, lighting a cigaret as Smallwood gathered up his papers and the office cleared amid a sudden buzz of talk. "But I simply couldn't punish. Fancy getting caught out by sheer ill luck just as he was going! I suppose he thought an odd round or two might be handy at home. All these border men have blood feuds on hand. But he might have told *me* the truth."

"Having told a hurried lie he felt he must stick to it, I suppose," remarked Smallwood. "But I'm glad you let him off."

"A thoroughly reprehensible and illegal affair," commented Browne. "I ought to have jugged him for six months at least. But I've lived too long with the giddy Pathan."

"MUHAMMAD ALI, sahib," announced Smallwood's Khattack orderly that night after dinner, pushing his grinning face round the flap of the tent where Smallwood was writing his home mail.

Muhammad Ali entered in spotless regimental mufti, flowing white shirt and green and cherry silver buttoned waistcoat, jauntily tied turban and smart sandals. Smallwood looked at him, wondering what he wanted. His papers had been signed up, he had been given three months' advance of pension; officially he had said goodby.

The Yusufzai looked round to be sure the orderly was safely gone. Then he saluted again briskly.

"My cartridges, sahib — those two rounds from my box—"

"Well, I'm damned!" exploded Smallwood in English, pushing his writing away. "Of all the damned impudence—!"

"I must have them," continued Muhammad Ali in Pushtu, regardless of the strange noises which appeared to betoken mingled wrath and amusement on his officer's part. "They're all I have—two rounds . . ."

"Sit down," said Smallwood abruptly, motioning to the carpet before the fire as he wheeled round his chair and lighted a cheroot.

The Yusufzai squatted by the fire.

"Why couldn't you tell the truth to Browne sahib?"

The sepoy made a little gesture with his well shaped hand, on which glinted an odd shaped silver ring.

"How could I? The government's orders are strict and my fate was against me. Because some son of an ill reputed mother steals a watch—a shameless deed among honest men—it seemed that I must go to jail, lose my pension and, worst of all, lose my life. There was nothing to say to Browne sahib. For many months have I hidden those two rounds. But Browne sahib is a person of discernment—doubtless he understood. He knew I was not one of those shameless ones who would blacken the regiment's name by killing in the lines against all custom and decency; he understood this was another matter, an affair of private honor." The sepoy held out his hand. "Sahib, give me back my two rounds."

"And wherefore?" asked Smallwood. "Moreover, they are not thine but the government's."

"The government is rich and I am a poor man," answered the sepoy. "My enemies wait for me on my road home once I pass the police border beyond Dargai. I would like to see my family and my son before I die. With two rounds I might win through and clear our honor for, as the sahib knows, I am a marksman."

"Tell me the true story," said Smallwood, leaning forward and watching the man's gaunt face in the firelight. "There are none to hear—two friends may speak heart to heart."

"Thuswise it was, then, sahib. We were four brothers; three serving in the regiments and one, the eldest, remaining on our land at home. He was to be married; we had paid the girl's parents the money for the wedding as is the custom, though we are poor folk—there is no

canal in our hills as the government has made in the administered districts below, where land yields ten-fold and men grow rich. With us it is only the rain that brings crops, and when the rain fails we go hungry.

"And then Fateh Khan, whose mother was visited by the devil to produce such offspring —" the Yusufzai politely refrained from spitting in deference to the surroundings—"Fateh Khan laid claim to the girl saying, with a lie, that she had been promised to him. But he was rich with many friends and so prevailed, and her parents gave him the girl though she did not wish it. She sought to flee with my brother, but Fateh Khan and his friends discovered this and I, who was but a recruit on leave, saw my brother brought home on a bed with half his head blown away. Therefore we three had to take up the case. As the sahib knows well, there are no police and no law in our hills.

"My second brother, who was now the head of us, took leave and returned home, prepared to go up against Fateh Khan with my father's old gun; but Fateh Khan slew him unawares. Then came the wars and the two of us who were left had no opportunity of leave. But during those years Fateh Khan prospered exceedingly, for none of his folk served in the army. They grew fat and rich, and made trouble for our womenfolk at home, seizing our land.

"Thus it was that when peace came and we could return home, my third brother determined to set our honor right. During the war he had saved enough to buy a good rifle of government make. He went alone and lay up on a hillside opposite Fateh Khan's house for two days and two nights, waiting his chance. Thus was the story told me by one who saw. And on the morning of the fourth day he observed our enemy at the window of his tower. There was no mistaking his turban and coat and so, taking careful aim, my brother fired.

"But such was the devil born cunning of that son of shame that it was not Fateh Khan at all. Having heard that my brother had returned and was setting out against him, he laid a trap so that my brother fired, not at him, but at a dummy which those within raised to the window. Then when my brother fired they marked the spot and ringed him. He did his best but what can one man do against five? But he had eight bullets in him when he died and two of his enemies were sore wounded, and one will not walk again.

"Therefore the matter now fell to me—the last of us four. But my brother's rifle was taken by our enemies so that we had no weapon left at home and there was no money to buy another. As the sahib knows they are very dear, especially those of the government which have first to be stolen at the risk of men's lives. And as Fateh Khan had taken the best of our land and, save me, we have no grown men left at home, all my pay has had to go to feed them, my brothers' widows and my own family.

"But with much trouble I saved enough to buy a Kohat Pass carbine, made in the Adam Khel country—an old gun almost worn out, but taking government ammunition and good enough to fire a few rounds—and if I can get near enough I shall not need more than one. But there was no money left for ammunition, which is worth its weight in silver among us.

"Therefore, sahib, I concealed those two rounds one day when we were out field firing, and have hidden them ever since." He held out his hand again. "Sahib! Only two rounds and they have many! If I have them not I die; with them I may first slay Fateh Khan and, perhaps, even save my life for awhile. I have served well in our regiment."

He stopped and all the stolidity was gone now. In the green eyes showed something of the strain of the years, of the man who carried his life in his hand, a lonely man with women and children dependent upon him. Two rounds . . .

Smallwood shaded his eyes from the glare of a lamp. A most reprehensible business. Muhammad Ali was lucky not to have been court-martialed for a serious military offense. And here he was asking

boldly, albeit he had carefully come late at night, for his two precious rounds of stolen ammunition.

Smallwood, who knew the Yusufzai country, pictured the scene: the lone man returning from the distant railway station in the administered country to the wild hills where the Indian government had never extended law and order; the path over the hills to the dilapidated mud tower where three women and two children eat sparingly on the savings from Muhammad Ali's scanty pay. Opposite on the more fertile hillside would lie the prosperous fields and the strong house of Fateh Khan, with half a dozen well armed men waiting joyfully to end the feud, which had occasionally caused them trouble. It had forced them to move cautiously in their ways.

But now—a lone man with a worn out Afridi made carbine and two rounds. On that slender thread hung the life of a man who had stood by him in war while, as the Yusufzai put it, others had stayed at home and grown fat and rich.

The major rose. Being a conscientious man, when he decided to do a thing he did it thoroughly. From his rifle case he extracted twenty rounds of sporting .303, soft nosed, expensive stuff of Kynoch's best, and the two old tarnished rounds of arsenal make taken from the sepoy's box. He handed them to the man.

"Shoot straight, Muhammad Ali," said he, "and God be with you!"

There was a gleam in the Yusufzai's eyes as he folded the priceless gift away under his shirt.

"May He have you in his keeping always, sahib," he answered with real feeling as he gripped Smallwood's hand.

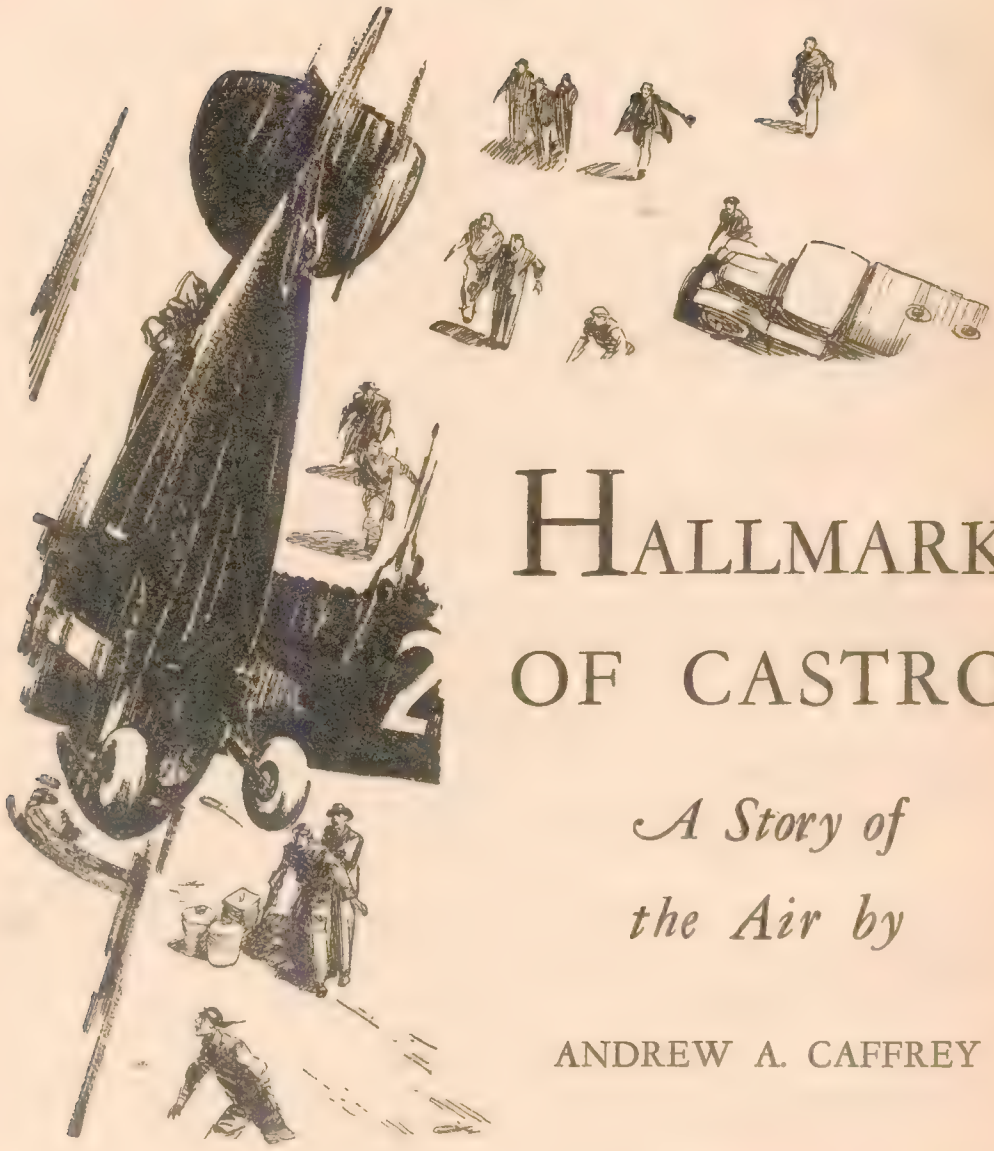
Then, silently, he went out into the starlit night.

The STAMPEDE

By HARRY KEMP

A FLOWER or bird will waken memory's magic
Where hearts will shun the weighty or the tragic:
It is by tricks of mind that men remember . . .
Twilight, and its first star, had just begun;
Some of us rested by the camp-fire's ember;
Some rode the herd massed in the dusk's last glow;
Red as a prairie fire had sunk the sun,
With level rifts above it, in a row.
Then came the moon, that brought forth every blade
Of grass, like dawn; while, far off, Indian file,
The great bluffs marched; each cast, distinct, a shade.

How could we know that something would go wrong?
We trusted in the boys that sang their song
Riding around the herd—and yet we knew
A haunting danger: the beasts' restlessness
As the stars climbed mysteriously grew.
A coyote seemed a soul in purgatory—
It was the signal for the start, I guess—
For lifting like one steer the herd began
To thunder on into the moon's hushed glory,
And we went rushing with them, horse and man!
To ride with a stampede 's a glorious thing!
Both horse and man must chance the prairie's dog's hole;
One misstep where those storming horns outfling
And God is waiting for your naked soul!
O, life was keen and good as we went riding
In test supreme that poets call romance,
Hoping for that great, moon-vast herd's subsiding
While death and life cut cards upon the chance!
Other stampedes I've know where men went under
While the herd stormed above with solid thunder—
But this one I remember most, whose story
Is only of a ride up the moon's glory!



HALLMARK OF CASTRO

A Story of the Air by

ANDREW A. CAFFREY

TO AVIATION, while aviation was yet on the threshold, Juan Castro brought art and heart and utility. The art was his, the art of a Cellini or Stradivari. And the heart was his, the heart of a master. Also, the utility was his, and he gave it to air when air was sorely in need of something that would take it out of the weeds. And more than any other man, Juan Castro did that—made ships that were ships.

Then the war came along. Castro, with his own country, Spain, standing neutral, came into prominence as a purveyor of fighting aircraft for the now defunct Wild Bill, late of Germany. However, said Wild Bill was fortunate enough to secure those fine planes from Juan Castro only after certain of the Allied air ministries had turned a deaf—also very dumb—ear to the Spaniard's sales talk. It was said—in knowing circles, too—that even Uncle Sam had a chance to secure the output of Castro's factory.

Anyway, letting bygones be bygones, the fact remains that Germany got the ships; and the Allied fighting pilots got it in the neck, from those planes. But all that is in the past, and years roll by to make us forget. Which is well.

Castro ships, even back there in the days of the war, were world beating pieces of equipment. It would be very hard to state which of Germany's two outside builders—Castro or the Dutchman, Anthony Fokker—furnished the better craft. For a fact, it is impossible to rate or grade these two men. Hardly fair. More or less foolish to differentiate between the two. Some even confounded these designers and builders; and they give unto Castro that which belongs to Fokker; and unto Fokker that which rightly belongs to Castro. Enough, perhaps, to say that each man was a leader. A leader hard to beat.

Fokker, however, was, in those war days, a builder of small ships. While Juan Castro designed and built ships of all classes and all sizes. In this, Castro was out of the ordinary. He is today, too. As a rule, a designer's ambition runs to either one or the other of two types of planes. That is, he is either a pursuit enthusiast, or he has large size ideas, and dreams of great ships of air—transports, bombers in season . . .

After the war, with his Central Powers market washed out, Juan Castro turned his eyes upon the world market. In particular, Juan Castro looked to America. The United States was on the up and up, where things of air were concerned. Air mail was opening a new field for craft of advanced design. Air lines were springing into being. Here and there, rich Yank individuals were spending real money for flying equipment. But over and above all, the good old Army and Navy—not to mention the Marine Corps—were digging down deep into the bottomless sock and offering big inducements for the maker of airplanes who could really put machines into the air. Money, money, money—for the man with a type of ship that would get up there and do some regular birding.

Juan Castro answered the call. He came to the land of gold.

McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio, was the Air Service's test field at that time. Juan Castro sent ships of new designs to McCook. These, every last one of them, were good ships. McCook soon learned to look upon a Castro product as a plane that needed no testing. Right there, Juan Castro began to take on the proportions of a man who was getting to be too good, too near to perfection. But, out of all fairness to the great Spaniard, let it be said that he entertained no such big headed notion. Not by a long shot! Juan Castro was humility itself. Also, he was a good business head. And if any one of his offerings failed to come up to expectations, Juan Castro would stand there and listen to the test pilots tell wherein the craft fell short. Then he would say:

"Yes, that's right. I agree. We will discontinue test work on this plane. Spend no more time with it. I will build you another ship."

And he would build another ship; two or three more perhaps, and all different. McCook merely had to show Juan Castro a motor, maybe a new type motor or an old standby motor, and tell him to build a ship around it. Soon, with neither fuss nor flurry, the ship would be on the line at McCook, all set for test.

No use talking, this man Castro had the flying world by the tail. No man living could compete with him. His were real ships. Never, even with his big stuff, was one of Juan Castro's brain children found to be lumbering or sluggish. Take-off? They had it. Climb? The way he could build climb into a ship was uncanny. Maneuverability? A long word, but he made short shift of all the problems that maneuverability offered. It's the truth; the flying officers were always to be found piloting Castro ships when they were flying strictly for pleasure. How about speed, ceiling and safety? All that stuff came in each Castro package.

Perhaps the greatest hand with a

Castro light job was little Lieutenant Bond. Little here means *little*. Lieutenant Bond flew with two seat cushions behind his back, this so he would be able to reach the rudder bar with his short legs. But fly! Wow—how the boy could do it!

Young Bond was a war product. His Front Line record had been a thing of high standing. But with the Armistice, Lieutenant Bond went wild and turned to stunting. And when he came to McCook Field, in '22, as a test pilot, he was rated as the Army's best stunt flyer. There was no argument about it, either. Bond had no peer in the realm of aerial acrobatics. Other good stunt men at McCook—Art Smith, Moseley, Street, Fairchild—would stand aside and admit the kid was king. Luckily, at about this time the parachute began to reach a practical stage of development; and Air Service had posted an order commanding all pilots to be thus equipped while on Service flights. Or any flights, for that matter. Within a week of the issuance of that order, Lieutenant Bond wrung the wing off a ship of well known make, at 10,000 feet, and took to his chute. The white flower bloomed; and Bond was, from that time on, a rabid convert to the goddess White Silk.

THE LITTLE guy was never without his chute pack. The McCook gang, his fellow pilots, kidded him. They claimed that he wore it at mess, on days of office duty and in second tier bunks, at the guardhouse, on those days when he acted as officer of the day. Bond just laughed it off. The parachute was his best friend, and he didn't care who knew it. He told them that they'd have to sneak up on him in the dark if they expected to find him without it. And, in keeping with this statement, little Bond even wore his seat pack when he was flying speed tests. Speed tests, you know, are flown right down close to the ground, where a pilot couldn't possibly utilize his ring bailer.

Anyway, just two weeks after Bond used his chute for the first time, he used it again. This time, at three thousand feet, another McCook ship came out of a cloud, at Bond's right rear, slammed into the kid's tail service and sliced the fuselage off at its thin point. Little Bond, with his chute working fine, ended that flight right on the corner of Third and Ludlow Streets, Dayton; and, being downtown, he stayed there and called it a day. You would too. Yeah, he was near his hotel, the Miami. He said that he was glad that his laundry was ready and waiting for him . . .

But to get back to the other ship, the one that rammed Bond—two McCook men died in that plane. Orders or no orders, they didn't have parachutes with them. Too bad.

However, it was a lesson for McCook. For a little while it was darned hard to find a test pilot without a chute. Some of them were wearing two, one front and the other rear. Double killings, you know, are just simply hell on the morale of a post. Hard to forget.

But all this seems to have little or nothing to do with Juan Castro, except that it has been said that Lieutenant Bond was a top hand when it came to flying the best and fastest of Castro's products.

With one certain Castro monoplane Lieutenant Bond one day actually flew what has been called a straight-up spin. With plenty of power—the power that you find in this year of our Lord, 1931—many pilots can now do the same stunt. But back there on the threshold of better ships and better motors, Bond was the first to essay the heady piece of air work. Anyhow, that particular job of straight-up spinning called for a good ship and a good man. McCook saw both on the job.

This new stunt, by Bond, seemed to open new avenues of aerial maneuverability. It was a combat element worth looking into. Juan Castro, who divided most of his time between McCook Field and his new Eastern factory, happened to be on hand when Bond pulled the spiraling zoom for the first time. Castro, a man not given to hat tossing or any

other kind of outward whoopee, did show great enthusiasm on this occasion. It seems that this pursuit plane, the one Bond was using, was a sort of pet with the great designer. He had placed much hope in the little bus and now it was living up to that hope. Going beyond it, in fact. Cause enough for even Castro to burst into cheers.

Now this particular pursuit monoplane was not highly powered. In fact it only carried an 80-horsepower rotary motor, which is no horsepower at all. So, insofar as you could disregard the motor, it must have been Juan Castro's design that was making good. This was why the Spaniard was so unusually happy. And why shouldn't he be?

When Lieutenant Bond pulled himself and attached parachute out of that ship's cramped cockpit, he and Castro went into a huddle with the rest of McCook's engineering staff. You'd think they'd found gold. Gold! What's mere, miserly gold to a group of airmen who have just uncovered untold flying value in the assay of a plane's worth? All gold is not yellow stuff that glitters.

"It handles like a damn," Lieutenant Bond told them, perhaps somewhat inelegantly. "My gosh, she's the sweetest flying job you ever rode. Imagine climbing like that without a real motor! Just a little, lousy, 80 horse whirling spray, and up she goes—straight! You couldn't have told me any ship would do it . . . Mr. Castro, it's a darb."

"I will make this ship better," Juan Castro promised.

"Oh, Lord, there it is!" Bond wailed. "We get a perfect ship, and the very next minute he wants to improve on the thing. Let it alone, Mr. Castro. She's got everything else backed off the map just as she stands. Let well enough alone. It's high time we had something fit to fly in our pursuit groups."

Juan Castro laughed.

"I will give you a good airplane, Lieutenant. I will make of this a fine ship. You gentlemen please give me a few weeks. You will see—you will see."

Juan Castro hopped a train East that same evening. The McCook gang said that the Spaniard had left town with a bundle of cast iron pipes and baling wire under his arm; and that was all he needed for a new ship. And the gang just about told the truth, for there was no mystery or hocus-pocus about Castro's methods. He didn't even ask for Government subsidy, nor did he cry and beg for appreciation. He was, is, an A-1 workman, and that's enough and plenty. Genius works alone.

WITHIN a month of this day, when Castro pulled East out of Dayton, he was back on McCook Field with two new ships of a type very similar to the up-spinning pursuit job that he had promised to make better. Generally speaking, the new and the old models were the same, except that these two were slightly larger in all dimensions. But the increase in size was hardly noticeable. You see, Juan Castro had abandoned the 80 horse rotary and built this late model around the new 300 horse Wright motor. This new Wright motor was nothing more or less than what the overseas gang knew as the Hispano-Suiza. Wright has the American rights. It was a compact, heavy installation, this Wright engine, with radiator and tanks—hence the necessary increase in ship structure.

Anyway, McCook stood around and watched the assembly crew draw these two pretty prizes from their crates. McCook, after that first peek, was all hopped up over the new ships. The test department could hardly wait, so eager were they to get that ship out to the deadline. So the assembly crew tossed most of its routine labor to one side and went to work on the setting up of these two Castro jewels.

Two of a model? Why two? All new models came to McCook in pairs. One ship was for sand test, and the other for flight test. Now what the devil might that mean, if anything? Fair enough question, too.

Sand test is the breaking down of a new model by loading the actual plane with sand bags until the wing and frame structure breaks under the load. What is more, and cruelest, is the fact that they busted up new ships that were complete in every detail. The manufacturer sent in two ships of the same model which he was trying to sell Uncle Sam. McCook—before flights could be made—took one of those two ships at random. Into the sand test room it went. Over on its back they turned it. Then, from underneath, they supported the craft with jack screws. Now the sand bags were piled on all surfaces and fuselage; and those sand bags were piled high until the new model cracked. And if the ship stood the test demanded, that is, if her safety factor proved ample, then they'd pile on some more bags just to see how good she really was.

If you loved planes, it would surely break your heart to stand there and watch them demolish a fine piece of work. They'll tell you that it is necessary, and maybe it is. It's like this. Suppose Antonio Stradivari were alive today and still making his sublime violins, would you expect him to break down one of each type just to make sure that some heavy chinned virtuoso wouldn't crash it in concert? Hardly! No, you'd be more in favor of breaking down the heavy chinned virtuoso.

They say that, practical as he is, Juan Castro would never consent to be on hand in the sand test room when one of his models was being smashed forty different ways from the center. Nor would he be in there when any other builder's brain child was under the knife. After the tests were run, and the reports were on paper, Castro would "give it a look" in the chief engineer's office. There he could learn all that he wanted to know without suffering the torture of seeing things ruined. Juan Castro was a builder, not a wrecker. However, up to date, Castro and McCook Field had learned little or nothing through sand testing, where Castro ships were concerned. The required safety factor was in every one of his planes; and the sand test gang only broke them down to add wonderment unto its own self.

Yes; they finished each Castro test wondering how in the devil frail fabric and thin metal could stand up under such unreasonable abuse. It was surprising. It was great, too.

But the sand test laboratory was an important institution at McCook Field, in spite of all that has been said herein. What other way had they of knowing whether or not a ship would stand up under trying flight conditions? No other way. Far better that they break up a billion dollars' worth of ships rather than break one test pilot's valuable neck.

McCook knew the truth of this too; for McCook had learned. And Air Service made the law—"no new model flies until one ship of this model has proven satisfactory under sand test"—then made that law stand up. And it stood, invulnerable, month after month and year after year. It was the best safety factor—better even than the mechanical safety factor in the ship—the pilots had. It saved their lives. It kept them, placed them, beyond the clutches of political and incompetent builders of inferior, murderous planes. Of which there were plenty.

Then, with everything running so smooth for the test pilots, a great manufacturer got so good that he was bad; very bad. But not too bad, for, maybe, it was not his fault. Juan Castro was—is—the man.

When these Castro models arrived at McCook, the sand test lab was busily running tests on a Loening product. These Loening tests were taking more time than usual, for some reason. The sand test engineer said that he could not take on the crashing of the Castro model until day after tomorrow. That was a long time. It was a long time for the flying gang to wait before being able to see this sweet looking ship in actual flight. And how they crabbed! Why, they wanted sand test lab to chuck that Loening job outside. Let it wait! Bust up this regular ship! Come on, let's have some action!

But sand test was adamant. They had ruined fine planes before this, so why should they be in a hurry now? The Castro crock would wait. And if flight section didn't like it, well, flight section could lump it. Or words to that effect. Only much snappier words, you know.

Well, anyway, an hour came that found both of the 300 horse Castro pursuit monoplanes all set up and ready to do it. One was down in final assembly hangar, right near the door of sand test lab. The other ship was up in the main hangar of flight section with a big "Not To Be Flown" sign hanging on it, where all might see. And all did—hell!

Lieutenant Bond, before and after every flight he made that day, came in to walk around that ship in main hangar. There he was, with his trusty pack chute slapping away at his legs as he walked, moving around and around that slick mono and patting it like a horse. You could tell that he'd give a right arm for a chance to fly the job. And what a pretty job it was!

The fuselage was the conventional tubular rod frame, covered with fabric; but the beautiful monoplane wing was entirely of wood, finished natural. And you'd just stand there with mouth open and wonder how Castro could put enough strength into such a long, thin, light wing. Thirty-six feet of spread, with a fuselage suspended at only three points. And the thickness of that all wood wing fell away to just about no thickness at all, out toward the tips. Man! you just knew that those wing tips would curve up like a buzzard's in a hard dive.

But what of it? Lots of good wings do that. They're supposed to stand the curving strain, too. That's where structural finesse proves up. Let 'em curve and be damned, just so long as they don't snap. Castro wing tips had always remained with the rest of the wing—even in all former sand test smash downs.

So, with those ships quarantined, and with little Bond walking in impatient circles, it looked like a few dull days at McCook Field.

HOWEVER, at this darkest moment, an ancient Army custom came to the rescue.

Now, everybody knows that it is an old Army custom to take it for granted that all Army orders are made only to be broken. Ask any Army man—commissioned or enlisted—and he'll tell you so. It's the very first thing a man picks up in the Army, for a fact.

It so followed that permission was given Lieutenant Bond to hop the new Castro monoplane; and the little guy, with half of McCook Field at his hurrying heels, came out to the deadline where mechanics already had the new ship warming up. Juan Castro was among those on hand.

The field inspectors, all sorts of inspectors, were going over the new bus from prop to rudder, inside and out. They were overlooking nothing; and Bond, adjusting his parachute harness, stood to one side and waited. Finally, with much aplomb, the chief mechanic slid out of the small cockpit, and reported:

"She's all set to hop, ready to go, Lieutenant . . . But just a minute; you can't wear a pack chute in this ship."

"No?" Bond questioned. "Why not, Joe?"

"It has the old type seat. A round back bucket seat with a hump at the cowling. You can't use your pack in it; and you couldn't get it out, if you did get in."

"Not so good," Bond agreed. "Wonder how come?"

Juan Castro was alongside now. He rubbed his lower lip, holding up his jaw at the same time, and mused:

"That is funny. It is my fault. How thoughtless of me to allow my factory men to install this old style seat. You see, we have any number of these seats at the factory. However, its installation was an oversight, Lieutenant."

Lieutenant Bond asked the chief mechanic how long it would take to change this old type seat and replace it with another. The chief said that chute seats weren't carried in stock. He'd have to put through a work order on the

sheet metal shop and have one made up.

"And how long will that take?" Bond wanted to know.

"Let's see—" the chief mechanic speculated. "Say by noon tomorrow. Not before. There's only one bird on that work now."

"Too long, Joe," Bond decided.

He unsnapped the parachute harness and tossed his pack to one side. Then he climbed aboard.

"Why don't you wear a shoulder pack?" a fellow pilot asked.

"T'hell with it," Lieutenant Bond answered. "Haven't got the time. It's four o'clock now. I want to get in this hop today . . . How about this motor, Joe? You gave her a run, didn't you?"

"I did," the chief mechanic yelled. "She's O. K. Take her away!"

"Blocks out!" Bond shouted.

The blocks were yanked, and the 300 horse Wright started dragging that slick little ship out across the grass. At the far end of the runway, Bond kicked her around into the wind and throttled low for a last backward glance at his sky. He had the right of way, with no other ships in sight. McCook looked on.

McCook waited. Bond eased power to that fine ship and got under way. Slow at first, then with a hellish roar, that 300 horse V-8 motor took the throttle. The tail of the small bus came up. A few quick, nervous bounces and she was off the ground. Bond pulled her back and let her climb. And she did. Right up like a kite! Pretty.

The little monoplane went to five thousand feet in what looked like record time, though there were no official tests being recorded. It was a beautiful climb, and McCook thrilled to the sight.

Having five thousand feet under him, Bond now flew some easy turns. The plane was obviously handling fine. He put her in a dive. He pulled her out. Everything O. K. Then he put her in a harder dive, and yanked her out. She was all in one piece, as per Castro style. Now, at about four thousand feet, Bond looped a few times. They were fast, power loops, with full gun all the way around. Next, having won some altitude in his loops—which isn't the usual thing—Bond stepped on that rudder and rolled the fast bus. After that, just to make sure, Bond cruised at reduced throttle for a few minutes and inspected his ship as best he could. However, he knew Castro equipment, so he took it for granted that the bus was all jake.

Again, with confidence, Bond slapped power to the ship and dropped the nose. He was deep in his dive before the wail of motor reached the earth, so fast was that plane.

McCook Field grew tense. McCook knew what to expect. Here was the big stunt—the dive and zoom and up-spin. Bond's best.

A thousand feet of dive was above and behind Bond now. Still, all the way with full power, he held that shrieking ship to it. Two thousand feet had slipped past. You'd think that all the howling demons of hell had been turned loose in one down rushing band. And Bond soon had three thousand feet of dive raveled out behind his straight-up rudder. The air wise watchers knew that the ship was now falling as fast as was physically possible. But, just to make sure that he had all the speed that could be kicked out of the little craft, Lieutenant Bond held her through the fourth thousand feet of dive. He was very close to the ground by that time. Lord, what flying guts that took! The dive is awful.

Bond began to pull out of that dive. True to form, the good Castro ship came out of that hard dive, and zoomed. McCook breathed again, for all ships don't come out of all hard dives.

In that roaring zoom, nose straight up, Bond kicked into his vertical, climbing spin. One thousand feet of spinning zoom! Two thousand! Thr—

Something seemed to leave the ship. It careened, stalled . . .

McCook knew a great chill around its heart. McCook went sick.

It was a wing's tip—about five feet of wing tip—that had quit the ship. Sick,

sunk, silent, McCook watched that tip float down.

But McCook couldn't watch Bond. Not now.

Well, according to every law of the game, Lieutenant Bond's number was up. And McCook took it for granted that the great little pilot had flown his last ship. But aviation, than whom there is no more jesting jester, had other and funnier ideas.

The ship, with a wing tip gone, was out of control. So it went into the habitual spin. And how it did spin! However, the ground end of that spin was to be in a thick clump of tall trees. And just before those tall trees came up, that out-of-control ship flattened out of its spin—as all ships will do every so many turns of fall. Then, having flattened out and slowed up, the darned ship went back into its spin again. It never recovered from this spin. But what was left of the downward trend wasn't so darned fast. At least, it wasn't as fast as before. And when the ship hit those treetops, and splashed, it hit more or less flat.

That is, the nose wasn't hard down and boring. But it did splash! Oh, yes, and that frail craft just simply busted asunder, forty ways from the center. The motor went into the ground. What was left of the wings draped themselves here and there amid the green foliage, and they say that those trees shed small parts for several minutes—small ship parts.

As for Bond, they found him in the higher branches. He was still wearing the cockpit's cowling as a collar, but no more of the ship had remained near him. He had two broken legs. Also one arm broken twice. There were other injuries. The McCook Field medical men really exclaimed over his condition. They said he was a study; and they called in other men of the profession to witness all the swell things they intended doing to Bond. He'd pull through, sure.

They say that Lieutenant Bond regained consciousness on the operating table. He came to just for a few shakes—just long enough to see what was going on. At McCook Field they'll still tell you that Lieutenant Bond, before going back to sleep, said:

"That's the stuff, Doc. Sew a couple of parachutes on to me while you got all this help."

A Novelette of Diamond Prospecting in the Jungles of Venezuela

CHAPTER I

THE BUM

THE REELING form of a man, dressed in filthy tropic whites, reached the interminable yellow Spanish house wall stretching up the steep street; a wall broken only by heavy doors, iron barred windows and intersections of cross streets. The groping fingers grasped an outcurved grille and for a moment the man hung there, beginning to bellow at the top of his voice a maulin song.

Unknowing, he now was leaning against the Hotel Bolívar, which, in an American or European city, would be considered a fifth rate boarding house, but which here in Ciudad Bolívar, the only large town on the Rio Orinoco, was the leading hostelry. Merely a somewhat renovated old residence, the place had the usual defensive equipment of Venezuelan homes, including door-like windows of dense wood, tough enough to stop bullets. Now, behind the bars supporting the intoxicated man, a blank shutter squeaked open with impetuous force. A violent hand smote the lounger on the back, pro-

BUSH DEVILS

By

ARTHUR O FRIEL

pelling him outward. And an angry voice commanded:

"Get to hell out of here!"

The drunken fellow staggered ahead for three steps, nearly thrown off balance. Then he wheeled, suddenly sure footed. As he confronted the window his right hand was at his left side, under his loose coat; his head was forward, his shoulders stooped, his body crouched. Voice hard and cold, angrily sober, he snapped:

"Speaking to me?"

"Who else?"

The man outside gave no answer. Tense and dangerous as a jaguar suddenly aroused, he stood dark against the late moonlight, searching the face illuminated in the barred rectangle. That hostile face was long, hard jawed, cut across by straight black mustache and brows, and topped by tumbled black hair. Beneath it were strong shoulders in brown pajamas. The hands resting on the low sill were half shut, but held no weapon. After a silent moment of antagonistic watch, the man in the street let his own right hand sink and hang idle.

"Sorry I woke you up," he crisply apologized. "I'm slightly tight, and up the wrong street. But go on back to bed,

and I'll go on to hell out of here, as per order. *Buenas noches, señor!*"

With ironical courtesy he swept off his peaked palmleaf sombrero, bowed, turned right, and shuffled away up the Calle Libertad, obstinately pursuing his random course. And, once more under way, he swung into a reckless ditty:

"Hallelujah! I'm a bum, bum,
Hallelujah! Bum again!
Halle-hallujah, I'm a bum-bum-bum—"

Behind him a door creaked. He blinked rapidly, stiffened, faced about. Noiselessly coming up the walk was the man he had seen in the window.

"Looking for trouble?" growled the wanderer.

The barefoot pursuer smiled thinly, but gave no answer. Empty handed, loose muscled, he came to a stop and critically surveyed the other from top to toe. His gaze took in the twenty-cent hat, threadbare coat, torn shirt, frayed trousers, sockless ankles and native sandals; came back, and centered on the sallow, unshaven countenance whence peered vigilant pale eyes. Under the short black mustache the smile took a contemptuous quirk.

"Trouble?" echoed the follower. "You'd be no trouble. I just came out to see whether you were really a white man. Your voice sounded like it. But I see now that you're just a dirty yellow rat. And so, good night!"

He sauntered back toward the hotel entrance. The man behind him grew more rigid. Suddenly he started forward.

"Say, you!" he hailed wrathfully. "Wait a minute!"

The hotel guest turned leisurely. The other marched straight at him. As he came, he drew from under his waistband a revolver—and flung it aside, to clack on the sidewalk. Disarmed, he stopped with fists on hips. Through set lips he challenged:

"Yellow rat? Want to prove that?"

Again the one in pajamas withheld reply. His glance flicked to the discarded weapon, contemplated the antagonist's pugnacious poise, rested on the square jaw and tight mouth. Audibly he sniffed. Then, as if considering a bug, he mused aloud:

"You act like a white man, at that. And evidently you bathe, even if you don't shave. Yes, maybe you were a white man once. How did you get this way, I wonder?"

The wanderer winced, but his retort was quick and forceful—

"I'm waiting to hear more about the yellow rat."

"Oh, yes? Well, maybe that name wasn't quite justified," judicially conceded the lean critic. "So I'll take it back. But as a white man you're a decidedly rotten specimen. And judging from your voice, you're American. I hate to see a thing like you representing the U. S. A. down here."

"Oh, yes?" mocked the unkempt prowler. "That's just too bad. But nobody asked you to look at me. And I don't represent anything but myself."

"Don't kid yourself. Every American in a foreign country represents America. And it's specimens like you that give America a black eye everywhere—drunken howlers that tell the world they're bums with everything they say and do."

The shorter man winced again, more visibly than before. His gaze swerved, glanced down over his own bloated shape and slovenly clothes; came up the lean, fit figure in immaculate sleep garments until it once more met the piercing dark eyes. Then the stubbled mouth tightened with defiance.

"That's just too bad," he said hoarsely. "But wait till you've been where I have. Then you won't even have guts enough to sing!"

"Think so?"

"Yes, I think so! You're the bird that got off the steamer three days ago, and you're going up the Rio Paragua to hunt diamonds. Wait till you get there! Yes, wait! Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

His sudden wild laugh rang loud in the somnolent street. His teeth gleamed maliciously in the moonshine. Still grinning, he swung on a heel and, abandoning

further altercation, started away up the hill.

Then he halted, looking down. One foot had stubbed against his forgotten revolver.

Stooping, he grasped it, tried to straighten up. The effort failed. With the change of position and the relaxation of resolute control, alcoholic fumes temporarily dammed had flooded his brain anew, doubly strong for restraint. Now, after a futile reach for support, he flopped on the sidewalk and lay there, chuckling foolishly.

The tall man stepped to him. Twisting the gun from the unready hand, he shoved the weapon under his own waistband; then heaved the soggy bulk to his feet and pushed him against the wall.

"As you were!" he commanded. "What's that about the Paragua?"

"Lemme 'lone!" wheezed thick protest. "I'm go'n' t' sleep— Mind y'r own— bus'ness and go t'—"

His knees doubled and he slumped down the wall.

So sudden was his collapse that the man holding him nearly fell with him. For a moment he stood scowling at the collapsed figure. Then, with a disgusted grunt, he slid the revolver into the nearest pocket of its owner and left him.

At the hotel door, however, he paused, looking back, brow furrowed with thought. His eyes rested on the huddled form, roved on up the *calle*, dwelt at the top of the hill. They saw only the receding walls, bright on the eastern side, blackly shadowed at the west, vanishing into the starry sky at the crest. But they seemed to look far beyond those narrow limits, vaguely visioning something many a league away, at the south. All at once they came back to the white blot on the walk. With purposeful stride he returned to it.

He straightened the man out, took off the cheap hat and sharply studied the head and relaxed features. He lifted a nerveless hand and regarded it thoughtfully, speculatively. He took the revolver from the pocket, swung out the cylinder, ran a finger tip around inside the frame, inspected the finger in the moon radiance; snapped the gun shut with expert flip of the wrist, and restored it.

"Clean," he muttered.

Wherewith he firmly clutched the collar of the sleeper and dragged him down the walk. A moment later the ponderous hotel door swung shut. A heavy bolt clacked into a socket. Once more the Calle Libertad, empty of life, slept under the sinking moon.

CHAPTER II

BELOW THE BELT

THE SQUATTY Hotel Bolívar surrounded an inner patio, flagstoned and flowered. Its open air dining room, patronized by many local bachelors, was on a rambling gallery overlooking that garden. There, as *cena* was served on a hot February evening, Venezuelans eating at various small tables sent many covert glances at a strangely mated pair seated at the far end.

Both were foreigners, *norteamericanos*. But the one was a señor, a gentleman; the other a *bajuno*, a low fellow. The former, straight backed, high headed, alert, clad in cool brown, commanded respect. The latter, slouching, sluggish, shabby, unshaven, seemed the more disreputable by contrast. Why should the señor bring such a creature to his table?

The señor gave no answer to that unuttered question. Aloof, wordless, he ate heartily, produced cigarets, lighted one, laid the package on the table, smoked. More slowly, his companion finished his own meal. Meanwhile the local residents dribbled streetward. At length the two were left alone.

"Feeling better now?" suddenly queried the host.

The guest, lighting a cigaret from the open pack, nodded. Tossing away the match, he hoarsely acknowledged:

"Yeah. Much obliged t' yuh, mister."

The man who had fed him smiled derisively.

"Cut out the tough pose," he prompted. "Be yourself, Bullard."

The sallow face across the table paled a shade. The gray eyes under the brownish brows contracted.

"Where d'you get that name?" came sharp retort.

"I've got more than that on you," easily declared the other. "While you've been sleeping it off today I've made inquiries about you. And your name's Frank Bullard, though you've been calling yourself Barlow here. My own name, by the way, is George Kittredge."

Bullard made no acknowledgement of the introduction. Face stony, he waited.

"You've been bumming around here for two or three months," pursued Kittredge. "You were brought in here by some peons who found you up in the back country, crazy from fever and starvation. You recovered in the hospital here, but went on a bust the minute you got out, and have kept it up ever since. Consequently you've lost whatever chance you might have had of selling either the American or the British consul the idea of shipping you home, f. o. b. They, like every one else, consider you a worthless bum. And that's not all."

His direct gaze stabbed deep into the eyes across the board. Then he ignited a fresh cigaret and casually regarded the fountain in the patio.

"Well, go on," said Bullard. "What else am I?"

Kittredge again regarded him keenly. The cold gray eyes remained unswerving, unreadable. Drawing another puff, the host parried:

"Plenty. Among other things, you're a man who knows something about the Rio Paragua. I'm going there. I can use a man who's been there. I've already found a couple, but I don't just fancy them. So the job of guide is still open. The pay will be good. To the right man there may be also a share in whatever is found there. Or, if nothing is found, a free ticket home when we come out."

His swift sentences ended abruptly. Into the icy eyes in the other chair shot a sudden warm light. They lifted, looked northward. But then they shrank and hardened.

"Fat chance!" scoffed Bullard. "You won't come out."

"No? Why not?"

Silence. Again the stocky man in whites looked into the shadows beyond the rail, as yet untouched by the late rising moon. His lips and lids tightened into grimmer lines. At length he recalled:

"Seems to me I said something to you about the Paragua last night, though my memory's foggy. And—"

"Yes, you did," interposed the other. "And how did you know then that I meant to go there?"

"Easy enough. As you've just said, you've been interviewing a couple of would-be guides. They've blabbed in the saloons."

"Oh. Trusty men."

"Very," dryly assented Bullard. "If you'll take a tip from me you won't sleep alongside either of them on a dark night."

"Uh-huh. Well, go on about the Paragua."

Bullard's mouth tightened again.

"Keep off it! If I told you to go there last night it was the same as inviting you to go to hell. That's what you'll find there. And the diamonds you're expecting to pick up—humph! Try to get 'em!"

"What'll stop me?"

"What won't? Fever—rapids—snakes—beasts—and devils!"

"Devils?"

"You heard me."

"Sounds interesting. What kind of devils?"

Bullard scowled. Abruptly he shoved back his chair and arose.

"I'll be going. You'd better do the same. Use your ticket home while the going's good," he advised. "You're not the only bright boy that's ever tried to get rich quick in that territory. Men have gone in there ever since the Spaniards started hunting for El Dorado. And most of them are still there. Bones!"

Kittredge shrugged carelessly.

"The whole earth's cluttered up with dead men's bones," he remarked.

"All right. Drop yours wherever you please. I'll keep mine together awhile longer. Good night. Thanks for the bed and meal."

He turned toward the distant street door, but paused, held by the newcomer's changing gaze and tone, both now full of contempt.

"Yes, I was mistaken," mused Kittredge. "Last night you seemed to show signs of possessing some guts. But that was just Dutch courage."

Angry red flooded the sallow visage. The brown fists shut.

"And," deliberately added the seated man, "that rumor about what you did to your partners may be true. It begins to look so. And in that case—"

Pausing there, he flipped an ash off his cigaret with an air of casting away something else equally worthless.

Bullard suddenly came forward, leaning half across the table, fists on the board, eyes ablaze.

"Explain that!" he rasped.

Kittredge, still sitting easily, lifted one eyebrow.

"It ought to be clear, Bullard. When a man's been in the bush with partners and comes out without them, folks talk. Especially if he makes a bum of himself. And I can see why, if the fellow really had killed his pals, he'd be afraid to go back to where he'd done it. Ghosts in the night, and so on. But if he were innocent he might square himself by going back with some other chap and making good. Then he'd be in the clear all around. But—"

"Damn you!" cried Bullard. "It's a filthy damn lie! And you'll eat it!"

"I've eaten all I intend to this evening, thanks. And if it's a lie, prove it!"

THE BADGERED man swayed still farther forward, his temple veins swollen with rage. But he caught himself and poised motionless, fierce gaze beating into the cool regard of his challenger. Slowly then he drew back, straightened, stood a moment longer with wrathful color slowly subsiding. All at once he wheeled and walked away, neck stiff.

Kittredge, watching with a satirical smile, casually called—

"The job remains open until tomorrow morning."

Unheeding, the vagrant receded along the gallery to the street exit. His hat, hanging on a peg, remained there. Bareheaded, he disappeared into the outer dark.

Kittredge chuckled.

"That was a dirty trick," he murmured. "But when fair means fail there's nothing left but foul. And sometimes it takes a punch below the belt to really arouse a man. And now—well, we'll see what we'll see."

Whistling a little tune, he marched away to his room. There, leaving his door ajar to admit the cool night breeze flowing across the patio, he opened his window wide and, sitting in the full glare of the overhead electric light, began perusing a book. At intervals he glanced outward through the Spanish grille.

An hour or two passed quietly. The moon rose, shining brightly on the red tiled roofs and yellow walls across the way. Occasional pedestrians sauntered past, pausing to peer into the lighted room, moving on as the reader gave them a straight stare. A mestizo girl murmured soft solicitation, received curt dismissal, laughed carelessly, was gone. At length the reader laid his book on the table beside him, stretched, smiled slightly, and spoke to another face outside—a light, still face without a hat.

"Come around by the door, Bullard. I've been expecting you."

The face moved aside. In a moment sounded the soft shuffle of *alpargatas* along the gallery. The door swung back, admitting Bullard.

At first glance it was plain that he had been drinking again. His eyes, smoldering and set, showed the effects of *caballo blanco*—white native rum. But his sure gait proved that he had taken only

enough liquor to steady his brain and to clear confused thoughts. Stopping before the lounger, he regarded him squarely.

"Still set on going to the Paragua, Kittredge?" came a cold question.

"Still set."

"Still fool enough to trust yourself with a bum who may have murdered his partners?"

"I'll take a chance."

"All right. I'll go along—on my own terms."

Kittredge frowned slightly at that proviso.

"Name the terms."

"No pay. No free tickets or cigar coupons or other bait. No orders. One good rifle, plenty of shells. One machete. Grub. That's all."

The employer's frown deepened with puzzlement.

"I don't quite get the idea, Bullard."

"The idea is that I'm not your hired man. I do no work for you. I take no dirty cracks from you. I lead you to a certain place I've decided to visit myself. Chances of getting rich or getting killed are as good there as anywhere. If by any chance we live to come back we'll be well fixed. If not we'll be through. That's my proposition. Take it or leave it."

His tone was as firm and final as his words. Kittredge looked long at him in silence. Then—

"The place is on the Paragua?"

"On the Paragua. Away up."

"Good. And I'll take the proposition as it lies. It's a queer one, but I'll gamble on it."

"All right. See you in the morning. Good night."

Expressionless, Bullard turned doorward. Kittredge briskly arose, with a word of delay—

"Wait!"

"Well?"

"Well, you're right about the dirty cracks, and I apologize for them. I've just been trying to kick you awake."

"You've done it all right!" Into the wooden visage shot sudden feeling. "You've kicked awake things I've been trying to drown for months! And now that they're alive again somebody'll pay for that kick! Not meaning you, either. The bill's payable by other parties."

Under the drawn brown brows burned a flare of ferocity that held the listener momentarily wordless. Then he objected:

"Whoa! If you mean men around here, hold everything. That insinuation I made about your partners was my own dirty work. I just happened to hear that you were thought to have had some. Nobody intimated to me that you'd done them in. So, as far as that goes, your reputation is—"

"Reputation! Hell!" A bitter smile flitted over the stubbled mouth. "I know what my reputation here is. And the bill I'm speaking of is due a long way south of this town."

He swung outward. In the doorway, however, he once more stopped.

"If it'll make you sleep better," he concluded, "I'll tell you I've never yet doublecrossed a pal. Four of us came in by way of British Guiana. Three died. It wasn't my doing. But I know what got them. And that's why I was crazy when I was found."

With that he was gone. His sandals slithered away into silence. Kittredge sat again at the table, slowly smoked, suddenly twitched his shoulders and shoved the window shut. The breeze—or something else—made him a trifle chilly.

CHAPTER III

RIDERS

SOUTHWARD, mountainward, jungleward from Ciudad Bolívar run a few dirt roads, all execrable, varying with the seasons from parched dust to weltering mud, veering away toward different moribund hamlets, vanishing at other river shores or into labyrinthine forests. For some fifty miles into the hinterland they traverse hilly but comparatively open *sabanas*. Then, encountering the great jungle stretching to Brazil, their last survivor weakens and dies.

Beyond is dense, rough wilderness streaked by the long Rio Caroní and its many mysterious tributaries, humped and bumped by confused mountains, threaded by tiny trails made first by wild animals and afterward followed by wild men; a savage region still virtually unexplored and sparsely inhabited even by the indigenous Indians. Yet, since the Caroní borders the Venezuelan gold country extending east to British Guiana, men of various colors and conditions venture at times up the main river or along some branch stream, seeking always the same thing—raw wealth.

Of all the untamed affluents feeding the blackwater river, the largest is the Paragua, born in the dismal Sierra Pacaraima, wending its way for some two hundred miles among other gloomy mountains which are nameless and unknown. Near its juncture with the Caroní may be found, at long intervals, clay houses or pole huts, temporarily tenanted by unkempt natives, or deserted and decayed. Farther up, the shores bear no signs of human life save campsites used by furtive travelers who, if met, had best be approached warily.

Toward this snaky stream rode two men on bony ponies, leading a pack burro along one of the *sabana* roads. Slowed by the short steps of the little ass, they journeyed at a plod, lounging in saddles with enforced patience. Their own mounts, for that matter, were incapable of much speed or exertion; sorry brutes, old and stiff, yet good enough to serve the purpose of their masters. Bought outright, they were to be turned loose at the river and given complete freedom.

The route lay due south, following the prairie trail which, though worming in random curves among brown baked knolls, crawled ever toward the edge of the forest. At every slow hoofbeat a puff of dust rose under the trudging beasts, settling on their hides and on the clothes and faces of their riders. The travelers, broad hatted, khaki clad, cartridge belted, moved through the breathless heat with hardly a word. From under their hats hung wide red handkerchiefs, thinly protecting their necks against the enervating sun and hordes of bloodthirsty sandflies. Their faces, dark with sunburn and sweaty dust, looked fixedly ahead, watching for whatever might appear beyond each hillock.

This was the fourth day of their gradual pilgrimage across the broiling waste; the fourth day of unvaried monotony. Up at each dawn, they had breakfasted briefly, saddled promptly, and resumed the march begun at Ciudad Bolívar. At about one o'clock they had halted at some shelter, inhabited or otherwise, to eat, rest and protect the animals; for under the murderous sun of afternoon the poor beasts would, if worked, have fallen dead. Near night they had usually ridden a few miles farther, slung hammocks and mosquito nets among trees at a waterhole, and slept with one ear open. So far they had been unmolested by any prowler.

Thus protracted, the journey had begun to seem interminable. Yet the successive days of riding and roasting had wrought a perceptible change for the better in one of the men. His facial skin, yellow at first with old tan underlaid by unhealthy pallor, had taken on a more normal tinge of red; his body, flabby from alcoholic fat, had become somewhat firmer; and the whites of his eyes were more clear. His lean companion showed no change except deepening tan and somewhat thinner cheeks.

There had been but little conversation between the two, and that little was one-sided. In the course of the long halts Kittredge had sometimes told a yarn or two, revealing the fact that he had knocked around in odd parts of the earth, though never before in South America. Bullard had listened attentively, occasionally voicing a brief question, but neither commenting nor reciprocating with any information concerning his own past. When the tales ceased he loafed in silence, often lying for long periods moodily regarding things known only to himself. Day and night he was not only taciturn but somber.

Each night, on turning in, he took a

stiff drink of rum from a bottle carried on his hip. Otherwise he never touched liquor, although it was evident that his nerves clamored for a similar dose at siesta time. On the third night, after gaging the remaining contents of the bottle, he emptied it down his throat and threw it far from the camp.

"No more?" laconically asked Kittredge.

"That's all. Tomorrow night we'll be at the river."

His grim look southward betokened need for a clear head thereafter. And in the morning he carefully dusted his rifle and revolver and tested their actions before departing.

Now, at midforenoon, the mass of forest wherein ran the Paragua was not far off. And now, as they rounded a brushy hill into a straightaway, came premonitory news from that hidden stream . . .

MIDWAY of the sandy track beyond, a man on a mule stopped short, sat motionless, then jerked his head to right and left as if seeking a line of flight at the sides. There was none. The place was a shallow but steep banked ravine lined with tough, tangled thorn trees. After another look at the advancing pair he came on, at first slowly, then more courageously.

Short, swarthy, poorly clad, barefoot, but big mustached and keen eyed, he was evidently not a peon. As he met them he held up a forbidding hand.

"Stop, señores!" he warned. "Go no farther!"

"No?" drawled Kittredge. "Why not?"

The sharp eyes flicked over him and his companion, dwelt on the baggage burro, turned nervously back along the vacant road.

"*Guapos!*" he tersely explained. "Desperadoes!"

"Who?" snapped Bullard.

"Who? I do not know. But they are bad, señor. They have robbed me and—"

His voice trailed off. His gaze, fixed on the second questioner, seemed to shrink, and a strange pallor swept under his dark skin. For a moment he sat speechless. Then, recovering himself, he switched his eyes to Kittredge and completed his sentence:

"Robbed me, señor, and driven me out. In truth, it is only by the protection of the saints that I have escaped with my life. I am—I am a trader, señor, an honest one, I assure you. And these black villains have—"

"Black?" asked Bullard.

"*Sí, sí, señor!* But commanded by a *blanco*—a white! And if you go on—but excuse me, señores! I go to save myself! I can not linger—I—Santa Maria, preserve me!"

With a jolt in the ribs he started the mule forward. Sidling around Kittredge's pony, kicking his long-eared steed repeatedly, he lunged past. As he pounded away northward he again looked back fearfully. But now he seemed to be looking at Bullard.

Bullard, turning in his saddle, watched him narrowly until he disappeared around the hill. As the dust settled he frowned down at the sand underfoot, then looked up to meet a quizzical regard from Kittredge.

"The local Paul Revere seems smitten by your fatal beauty," suggested the latter. "He turned green around the gills after a good look at you."

"Maybe he has reason to. But I'm not sure. So I'll let him live."

"Meaning?"

"When I came down the Paragua I had some things on me worth money. When I was found out in this *sabana* I had nothing. In between those times I've a vague memory of asking somebody to lead me overland to the nearest Orinoco port. And that fellow's face—"

Jaw hardening, he looked again northward. Then, with a shrug, he resolutely turned his face to the south.

"That's ancient history," he dismissed the subject. "Let's go."

The horses trudged forward. After a few paces Bullard mused aloud—

"Pork knockers, probably."

"What?"

"That gang at the river."

"Oh. Well, what are pork knockers? That's a new term to me."

"British Guiana niggers. Diamond hunters. Called pork knockers because they live on salt port and knock around. Tough birds in general. These ahead will be a hard crowd."

"Sounds likely," cheerfully assented Kittredge. "The Guiana border's more than a hundred miles east, isn't it?"

"Right. Which means these babies are poachers, and probably outlaws. Otherwise they'd be working their own rivers."

Kittredge nodded. Bullard relapsed into silence. They pushed on as calmly as if no prospect of trouble waited beyond. It would have been easy enough, and obviously more prudent, to defer arrival at the river until the morrow, when the marauders probably would be gone. But neither of the riders suggested any such delay. On the contrary, after another wordless half mile an odd smile crossed Bullard's set lips, and he looked ahead as if anticipating not a loss but a gain.

The miles dragged away at the same slow creep, prolonged by the mincing gait of the burro, which neither could nor would cover ground like the rangy mule ridden by the fleeing Venezuelan. By noon, however, the short cavalcade had reached thicker tree growth, fringe of the deeper forest. There, at a shadowed brooklet, they halted, washed, ate and smoked.

Somewhere near now lay the small port where ended the dusty land track and where began the watery way into the unknown. Toward it still led the dying road, curving away to vanish into dense shade beyond which lurked black dangers. The smokers looked meditatively at it and covertly at each other. At length Kittredge stood and snapped his expiring cigaret into the stream.

"The animals can carry on a bit farther," he declared crisply.

The thin smile came again on Bullard's mouth. Without reply, he remounted. And, with no more words or sidewise looks, they resumed the march. As they went, each casually loosened the revolver at his belt.

CHAPTER IV

BLACKBIRDS

"WHO dar?"

The growling hail broke from a huge black shape sitting in a doorway of a low, rambling clay house in a small clearing.

Across that open space, where a narrow roadway cleft the thick woods, two men on horseback sat without answer. They saw, flanking the crack walled, thatch roofed house, a sizable open shed wherein hung an array of burdened hammocks; a small mud fireplace under a conical rain hood; and, beyond, the broad, dark surface of a river. For the moment, that was all.

"Who dar?" repeated the burly black, more loudly.

With the second challenge he heaved himself up. Naked to the waist, drab trousered, clutching a gun, scowling, he stood menacing as an ugly dog about to attack.

"Who wants to know?" retorted the taller of the two white intruders.

As he spoke he defiantly moved his horse forward a few steps, then paused. His fellow advanced beside him, watchful.

The antagonistic question and movement infuriated the negro. Leveling his weapon—a double barreled shotgun—he bellowed:

"Me! I ahsking yo'! Who yo'? Stop dar!"

The newcomers, having stopped before his belated command roared, regarded him in chill silence. He swayed slightly on his broad flat feet, and his reddened eyes betrayed plentiful potations of crude rum. Now, aroused by his ferocious bawl, slumbering shapes in the shed started from their hammocks and lurched forth. And in the doorway behind the truculent watchman appeared another.

The creatures erupting from the shed were black, big and belligerent. Some were totally naked, others clouted in Indian fashion. Only two wore a pretense of trousers, cut off at the knees. None carried a firearm, but all gripped heavy machetes. They staggered somewhat as they came, showing effects of drink even more plainly than the buck with the gun.

The man in the doorway, though of different color and race, looked a fit companion for them. Beefy, red skinned, frowzy, clad in dirty white pajamas, holding a long revolver, he glowered at the interrupters of his siesta as malignantly as any of his henchmen. After a momentary scrutiny of the riders and their laden burro, however, his expression changed, becoming coldly predatory. Harshly he spoke, stopping the blacks with three words—

"Back up, youse!"

The watchman looked over his shoulder and lowered his weapon. The other negroes halted. The commander swaggered forth, ostentatiously twirling the revolver around one finger by the trigger guard. Sauntering toward the horsemen, he demanded—

"Whatcha doin' here, huh?"

Voice, walk and attitude were those of an exceedingly tough American; the sort of American who flees the United States after some notably brutal crime.

"We might ask you the same question," countered the tall rider.

"Yeah? Think so, huh? Wal, ya might git told I'm bossin' things here—includin' you! And ya might git off yer high hoss and talk to me low down, where ya belong. See?"

The spinning weapon suddenly froze, butt in his fist. Without deliberate aim at either of the strangers, its muzzle virtually covered both. So quick was the transition from mere mouthy aggression to direct menace that the riders were caught unready, right hands near their own belt guns, but not quite near enough. Half drunk though he might be, he was a faster worker than they had suspected.

Now he grinned sneeringly. From the blacks behind him sounded snarling chuckles. Their machetes drooped, and they stood swaying drunkenly, leaving the next step in the complete humiliation of the captives to their hard boss. Yet they were ready, at a word, to lunge forward and smite savagely with their long blades.

The interlopers swiftly surveyed them all, reading eyes. Then the short one, hitherto totally silent and half disregarded, looked blankly at his companion as if awaiting instructions. If one foot kicked sidewise at the other's ankle, nobody noticed the movement. The ponies, like their masters, stood close, shoulder to shoulder.

"D'ja hear me?" rasped the red faced man? "I said git down! And put yer hands away up while ye'r'doin'it! Come on now, make it snappy!"

His gun centered directly on the tall man. The latter, poker-faced, parried:

"I hear you. Who wouldn't? And I see plenty. But how do you expect a man to get off a horse with his hands in the air?"

The antagonist blinked. His knowledge of horsemanship evidently was nil. But, before his gang, he could show no hesitation. Wherefore he growled:

"That's up to youse. Git off!"

"Oh, all right." The tall man glanced at his silent side partner, on his left. And if his left foot gave a responsive nudge, again nobody saw it.

"Move over," he directed. "It seems that we have to get off. And, since that's what we intended to do anyway, why delay? Take that bag of bones out from under foot. Then we'll go and talk to this gentleman face to face."

The short fellow kicked his beast sidewise. The tall one turned his face, watching him. All other eyes followed the movement. At the same moment both men swung off their mounts. Then, as their feet touched earth—

Rap-rap-rap-rap!

Two revolvers hammered in duet.

The tough white man jerked inward at

the middle, staggered, turned ghastly pale, toppled and fell.

As he thudded to earth his own gun spat flame. The random bullet rattled among high boughs of adjacent trees and was gone. Over his soiled pajamas spread rapid red stains.

While the astounded blacks gaped at the body, the two ponies were yanked broadside to them. An incisive voice snapped:

"Drop it! Down! Drop it!"

The staring eyes rolled up to behold revolver muzzles confronting them across the saddles of the intervening animals. The bronzed faces above those weapons were as hard and menacing as the guns. And every hand holding a bush knife loosened and let its long blade fall.

"You, there! Drop that gun!" barked the same voice.

The huge fellow with the shotgun had not yet obeyed the first command. Weapon halfway between port and aim, he stood irresolute, intensely watching his dead boss. As the second order bit into his brain he dragged his gaze upward, glared a moment, and then slowly let his gun sink. Still more slowly, he relaxed his grip on it and dropped it to the ground.

"Back up, all!"

They backed. Two or three sneaked glances over their shoulders, seeking a line of flight. But the same metallic voice warned:

"Don't run! You can't get away. Now halt! Stand fast!"

The orders were coming now from the shorter stranger, who had previously seemed subordinate to his mustached mate. The other, after a sidelong glance at him, let him keep the control so suddenly assumed.

A SILENT moment ensued. The blacks, sobered, fixedly studied their captors, who keenly surveyed each man in turn. They numbered sixteen. Though differing in height and shape, all were powerfully built. And, though heavy jawed and small eyed, all looked fairly intelligent.

"M-hm," softly murmured Bullard. "We're in luck."

With that odd comment he stepped from behind his cover and advanced into the open, revolver lowered but ready for quick action. Kittredge followed suit. Pausing beside the corpse, Bullard picked up the fallen firearm and pocketed it. His roving eyes came to rest on the brawny watchman, who sullenly returned his gaze without a waver.

"Who's captain of this crew? You?" he quizzed.

"Yas," came surly assent.

"Thought so. Get over there with your men."

Grudgingly the big fellow obeyed, looking wistfully down at the shotgun. Bullard, continuing advance, grasped the big bored piece, opened the breech, inspected the shells, snapped it shut.

"Buckshot. That's nice," he commented. "You boys know what it'll do to you if you make any breaks, don't you?"

Nobody answered vocally. But their uneasy looks at the twin muzzles spoke for them.

"Behave yourselves and you'll keep your health. Otherwise you'll get blown inside out. Form a line now and squat. All but you, Captain. You stand up behind them. We want a talk with you."

His voice was not unfriendly. The blacks eyed him again, somewhat less fearfully. The huge captain's look at him was a queer mixture of animosity, perplexity and partial mollification. Obviously all had expected brutal treatment, if not death, at the hands of their conquerors. As for the crew boss, the quick recognition of his status and the delegation of outward authority were pleasing. Promptly he used the empty prerogative of rank.

"Yo' hear de orders!" he rumbled at his men. "Form de line! Down all!"

With some jostling of bodies, the command was obeyed. Fifteen hunkered down in a row. The sixteenth towered

above them, chest out, chin up. Then Bullard made another diplomatic move. To Kittredge, momentarily ignored, he said—

"All right so far, partner?"

The tall man, standing with thumbs in belt and revolver drooping, nodded lazily.

"Perfectly good, old chap. Go ahead."

The dark brains which saw and heard, and which had taken first one, then the other, for the chief of the two-man outfit, now perceived that they had to deal with a team which acted on equal footing. Hence they accorded equal respect to each member of that combination. Which, in view of probable developments, was Bullard's aim. Now he turned back to the inky giant.

"What's your name?"

"My name William."

"William what?"

"William—sir."

Bullard repressed a smile. The reluctant title was worth more than the surname he had asked for. And dusky ancestries were of no importance.

"That's better. Who's this carrion?" He nodded toward the dead man.

"He—uh—he use de name O'Dowd. But we jus' calls he Chief."

The shrewd intimation that the fallen chief might have used an alias brought an open grin to the faces of both newcomers.

"Evidently you use your head to think with, William," complimented the questioner. "Many men don't. But what are you boys here for? You're a long way from home."

His continued friendliness of tone worked a noticeable effect on the listeners. Enmity was gradually draining out of their visages, and muscular tension was relaxing. William, best brained of the lot, now stood quite at ease.

"Dat be true, sir. We too far from home," he agreed. "But, de way it be, sir, we had a leetle contention back dar. Dis mahn—" he turned a thumb toward the sprawling corpse— "he humbug we to go work a rich creek for dimahns. But it don't be he own creek. We don' know dat, and when de true owner cyome wid he own men for to run we out dere be fight. We kyill some. Den cyome de English inspector for to ahsk for why we do dat. And de chief, he shoot de inspector. But den cyome four boat load of shooting men, and de woods be too hot. So we cyome over the border. De chief, he say we find dimahns up dis river. So here we be. We be hones' men, sir, but a leetle humbugged."

Fifteen black heads nodded solemnly. Two white faces crinkled with suppressed mirth. The declaration of innocent virtue by a man who so callously mentioned numerous killings was rather humorous. Yet that same man was evidently telling truth, when he could have invented a lie or refrained from any explanation.

At that thought their lips straightened. But Bullard's eyes still twinkled as he derided:

"Honest? Do honest men do what you've done here?"

He moved an elbow toward the house, deserted by its owner and undoubtedly looted.

"Hones' men must eat, sir," countered William. "And de eatings aren't been too good on de way. And hones' men obeys de orders of de chief. So done we."

One massive shoulder moved toward the fallen O'Dowd. Then the giant stood immobile, mouth tight. Manifestly he was through with excuses. Equally clear was the fact that he, as a Guianan, saw no crime whatever in raiding and robbing a Venezuelan.

"So you say," continued Bullard. "But don't try to grow wings and float around here like angels. You boys look too tough for that. Fact is, I think you're a gang of hard guys who'd rather fight than eat."

Grim smiles began to creep over the sixteen pairs of thick lips. Brawny bodies sat a little straighter. Glinting brown eyes showed a faint gleam of warmth.

"And if you are," thrust the speaker, "we may give you a job. A job with no pay unless you earn it, but good if you're good enough to get it. A job for strong

men, brave men, not afraid to work or fight. If you're that kind we can use you. But if you're only sneakthieves we won't have you. Now what do you say to that?"

Mouths stretched farther, showing strong teeth. One man half rose, caught himself, looked up at the scowling William, sank back. William shot glances to right and left, surveying his crowd; then, meeting Bullard's gaze, probed—

"What be dat pay?"

"Diamonds."

"Dimahns!" The big fellow mouthed the word lusciously. "Yo' knows de diggings, sir?"

"We sure do. Been there before. Pure white stones. Want some?"

Another pause. Along the line eight negroes tensed on their haunches as if about to spring up and volunteer, but remained in place. William still searched Bullard's face. Then he turned his eyes to Kittredge, who lounged expressionless. The big buck's survey went over him from head to foot, taking in anew his clean, lithe build; swung to the supine shape of the erstwhile bully O'Dowd; reverted to the waiting man with the shotgun. Across his dour countenance crept a brief grin.

"Chief, yo' got we," he succinctly announced. "Show we dem dimahns. Den we show yo' some working. And any mahn dat want fighting wid we, we show he plenty. Eh, hearties?"

At that word of notice the dusky "hearties" arose en masse. A mighty yell of assent thundered in the quiet clearing. Former master dead before them, new masters flanking them with guns, British law and Venezuelan hatred behind them, wealth somewhere over the horizon . . .

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" they yelled. "Dimahns! Fighting! Yah! Mahsters, show we!"

For minutes the uproar continued, gradually subsiding. Then said Bullard:

"We'll show you. Now, William, you're in charge. You know what to do. Do it. When all's done, come in and see us. By the way, do you want this gun back?"

He extended the shotgun. William sniffed.

"Wha' for?"

"Oh well, all right. Let's go, Kit."

He turned to the door and entered the house, slyly grinning. The proffer of the gun had been only a bluff, but it had worked. William, and all his followers, felt that he was completely trusted.

Kittredge, seconding his partner's instructions by a casual nod at the crew boss, stepped back to the ponies, drew the rifles from the saddle slings and walked houseward. As he faded into the dim interior, William's deep chest tones roared forth in arrogant commands.

"Isaac! Solomon! Patrick! Strip de hosses and de ass! Cyarry de gemmun's luggage inside! Robert! Daniel! Take cyare of dat corpus! Peter! Make de gemmuns some tea! And all yo' dirty cyattle, wash and dress yo'selves! Quick, now, 'fore I bash yo' heads! Don' make me ignorant 'fore de new chiefs! Walk away, hearties, walk away wid de new job!"

A moment later sounded a heavy splash. O'Dowd, bad leader, was gone to the fish and the crocodiles of the dark tropic river. And his followers, instantly forgetful of his existence, scrambled about in zestful endeavor to make good with the new masters who promised fighting and fortune.

CHAPTER V

BENA

THE MAIN room of the trader's house was a combination of living room and shop. A battered table and several rickety stools cluttered the earth floor. A hammock hung from rafters. Along the rear side ran a narrow counter backed by a few shelves.

Those shelves now were empty, while the counter was piled with a miscellany of loot. The marauders had ransacked the place and, under the orders of O'Dowd, put on the long board everything worth carrying away. At one spot, piled together, lay six rifles.

From among these firearms Bullard

picked a gun shorter than the others. After a survey of it he gave a morose grunt.

"No good?" drawled Kittredge.

"Good? I'll say it's good! It's my own old gun. And I was right about that yellowbelly we met out yonder. He's the dirty sneak that robbed me, misled me and left me away off the road to die. I recognize this whole dump now. If I could only get my hands on him!"

Kittredge scrutinized the gun, a .30 Savage, noticeably different from the .44 Winchesters still on the counter. Then he looked into Bullard's eyes, finding there a burning vengefulness which held him silent for a minute. Abruptly the other turned from him, dropped the weapon on the others, and swung back, face once more wooden.

"But that's ancient history," he repeated his phrase of the *sabana* trail. "Now—"

"Now wait," interrupted Kittredge. "If your gun's still here, how about other things? You said you were carrying something valuable at the time. And, by the way, what was it?"

"Diamonds. Few and small. But high grade."

Bullard's gaze roved about as if seeking sign of the vanished gems. Then he laughed shortly.

"Lost, strayed, or stolen," he surmised. "He wouldn't be keeping this cheap shop now if he'd cashed in on them. And who cares, anyway? There's more where they came from."

"Let's hope so." Kittredge's tone hardened a little. "But there's a point to be taken up in that connection. Up to now I've been letting you lead and backing every play you made. And you've played a heady game, especially with these pork knockers. But what's the big idea of letting this gang in on our stakes?"

Bullard's face froze. Cold voiced, he retorted—

"Any time you're dissatisfied with my game you can pull out of it."

The tall man reddened and his fists closed. But he spoke with calm reproof.

"That's no answer."

Bullard fronted him obdurately for a few seconds. Then his gaze swerved, went out through the open doorway, contemplated the dark river; and his attitude changed.

"My error," he admitted. "The big idea is that these blackbirds will be useful, and I'm kidding them along, using the likeliest bait. Your idea would be, I suppose, to offer them day wages."

"You suppose right."

"And you suppose wrong if you think they'd work well on those terms. I know my pork knocker, Kittredge. I've dealt with him and his tribe over on the river Mazaruni, in B. G, before I got into Venezuela. He'll go through hell and high water to reach a big shiny diamond somewhere unseen, and fight forty devils to get it. But work for wages? Not unless he's under government contract, and even then he'll probably prove unreliable. Likely as not he'll sneak the stones away from you when he finds them, or neatly murder you afterwards. And when I say neatly, I mean it. No bullets, no cutlass work, nothing rough that gives you a chance to fight or leaves marks on you. Just a little chopped bamboo in your food, or something like that."

"Bamboo? That's not poisonous."

"No. Not poisonous. But fatal."

"How come?"

"Chopped up fine—so fine that you don't notice it—it goes through your stomach and then mats together in your intestines. Result, complete stoppage. Result of that, acute indigestion and death. It never fails."

"Hm! That's interesting."

"You'll think so if you ever get it in you. And that's only one of the tricks the bush nigger knows. Which reminds me—"

He stopped short, again looking outside.

"Well?" prompted Kittredge.

"Well, let's sit down."

Kicking a stool to the table, he sat facing the door. His partner, eyeing him, sank on another crude seat.

"While I think of it—"

Bullard stopped again; then yelled—

"William!"

His sudden shout banged through the portal like a gunshot. From somewhere outside sounded dilatory response:

"Yassir, Chief! Cyoming!"

MANY seconds passed before the crew captain bulged in the doorway. When he did appear he was clothed and clean. His woolly hair was wet, his tremendous body draped with damp, wrinkled whites. Evidently he had followed his own commands and hastily bathed and laundered himself in honor of the new bosses. Sober, steady, straight eyed, he now repeated:

"Yassir! At yo' sarvice, gemmun!"

"It's about time you were," crisply declared Bullard. "Now tell me, do you know the scorpion *bena?*"

The black stared, pupils slowly narrowing.

"*Bena*, sir? What yo' mean?"

"You know what I mean. Don't try to humbug me, William. I've been on the Mazaruni."

The Guianan blinked, gradually grinned, and admitted—

"Yassir, chief, I knows dat *bena.*"

"Taken it yourself?"

"Um—ah—yassir, Chief."

"All right. So have I. But my partner hasn't. Any scorpions around here?"

"Not too many, sir. But I dares for to say I can find me one iffen yo' wants he."

"Do that. And hurry up. It's nearly sundown."

The great bulk withdrew from the opening. Ensued long moments of silence, broken only by Bullard's quiet confession:

"I'm a liar. I've never taken the *bena.* But I'm taking it now."

Kittredge made no reply. Whether or not he had heard of Guianan *bena* treatment, usually known only to bush doctors, he waited with outward calm for it to develop.

After a time William returned, huge hands closed before him. Striding to the table, he opened his cupped palms and dumped on it a huge scorpion.

"He de best I find, Chiefs," he announced. "He do for yo'?"

The white men barely repressed a leap backward from the venomous insect. Tail curled high, hooked sting quivering, it poised regarding each near victim, manifestly undecided as to which to attack first. Meanwhile William's small brown eyes cunningly strove to penetrate the expressions of his new chiefs. They failed. Before either the bush insect or the bush negro could clearly estimate the strangers, Bullard coolly replied:

"He'll do. Put him to work. I'll take it myself first, just to make sure that you know how to do it. And don't make any mistakes, big boy!"

His right hand sank to his revolver butt, and his gaze locked with the intent African watch.

"Hunh!" grunted William. "Me, I never makes no mistakes, Chief!"

With which he scooped up the dread creature and deliberately tore its elongated tail off its thorax, flipped away the mutilated body and broke the stinger from the thin, trembling joints remaining.

Bullard slid his loose shirt sleeve up to his left elbow. Promptly the Guianan scratched the exposed forearm seven times with the needle sharp sting, crushed the tail joints between powerful thumb and fingers, and rubbed the wet marrow down the scratches. At the end he eyed his work studiously, lifted his head and asked—

"Cyorrect, Chief?"

"Very good, William," assented Bullard. "You know your stuff."

With a pleased grin, the outlaw turned to Kittredge. Poker faced, the latter bared his own left arm. On it the vaccinator repeated his process, working even more carefully, squeezing the last drop of marrow juice from the flattened joints. Throughout the operation Kittredge sat unmoved, though considerably surprised. Contrary to expectation, it had been virtually painless.

The intentional thrust of an angry

scorpion is one of the most agonizing experiences a man can undergo. Yet the scratching of the severed tail had hurt no more than if done with a needle point; and the rubbing of the marrow into the red marks had left only a slight smart, as of diluted salt.

With a casual nod of approval Kittredge dismissed the operator, who lumbered out with a swagger. When he was gone the newcomer to the Paragua dryly remarked:

"Very interesting. What are the after effects? Stiff arm? Headache?"

"None at all. Except that tomorrow we can pick up a scorp without harm. Either he won't sting or, if he does, it won't hurt."

"No? Well, why bother with this precaution? Is this river any more buggy than any other?"

"Stick around and you'll find out."

Bullard arose and strode to the doorway; looked out, wheeled back.

"Kittredge, get this straight," he bluntly concluded. "I do things just because I happen to feel like it, and I don't like questions. I told you at Bolivar that I wasn't your man, and that goes. Just now I feel like taking this gang along with me and making it do whatever I want it to do. And while it lasts, this gang's mine. I know how to run it, and I'll run it my own way. If you want to trail along and take things as they come, with no questions asked, good. If you want to keep asking questions about what's what and why, not so good. We've pulled together so far. Now either keep on pulling with me or quit me. If you've got good sense you'll quit, here and now. Out of this gang that goes up this river damn few will come back—if any. And — Well, that's that. Think it over."

Whirling on a heel, he strode out.

Kittredge half rose, face flushing again; then sank back, glanced down at his streaked forearm, looked reflectively at the nearest dirty wall, and drummed on the table top with his finger tips. After awhile he smiled grimly, lighted a cigaret and blew a long puff toward the door.

"O. K, bum," he murmured. "When I buy into a game I stay with it. Play it your own way, and make it deuces wild if you like. But you don't freeze out G. Kittredge, Esquire. I'm sticking to the showdown."

CHAPTER VI

SOUTH

BETWEEN endless walls of lofty forest moved two long dugout canoes. In each rode eight muscular blacks and a white man. Amidships rested compact heaps of equipment and supplies, topped by ready guns.

Both canoes, and most of the equipment and guns, were plunder won by the raiding O'Dowd gang. Who had originally owned the dugouts and their paddles somewhere down the Rio Caroní, was a question to which the white men gave no consideration. As for the loot from the rascally trader's *casa*, Bullard had tersely remarked—

"He owes me a lot more than this."

And, on departing, he had eyed the thatch roof as if considering firing it and reducing the whole habitation to blackened ruin. But then, with another of his short shrugs, he had left it undamaged.

So the long boats had moved out and headed up the Paragua, each paddled by eight men, steered by the ninth. The ninth man in Bullard's craft was William, who, seated on the broad overhang astern, dexterously guided the ponderous shell with a spade shaped paddle. In Kittredge's vessel the same post was held by a short but abnormally wide fellow named Waldo, the crew captain's lieutenant. And, contrary to usual practise of white bosses traveling tropic waters, both Bullard and Kittredge were swinging paddles with the blacks. Each held the honored post of bowman, which, in dugout travel, involves the duties of both pilot and stroke. Their assumption of these working positions, however, had at first been vigorously combated by William.

"Chiefs, it be not seemly," he had protested. "Yo' mus' not work wid de cyattle. De white mahn mus' rest in de leetle palm cyabin we make for he in de mid de boat. Iffen he working he losting respect."

"That's too bad," Bullard had derided. "But that's what we choose to do. We know more about this river than you do, William. And now we ride forward and watch the way. That's all."

And that was all. After a moment of slow reflection the remonstrator had nodded, clumsily apologized, and gone to tip off his men to the innovation. And, after several days of voyaging, the disrespect predicted by William was not in evidence.

Both white men were river wise. Kittredge was as expert with the paddle as was Bullard; a fact which the latter had filed in his memory while listening to the lazy talks of the former on the parched *sabana*, and of which, in his sudden way, he now made use. Moreover, the tall adventurer was even more vigilant than his companion. While Bullard intently watched water and forest, Kittredge found time to study him with fleeting but frequent sidelong glances and smile unseen. He understood that the erstwhile drunkard, who had limited himself to one small bottle on leaving the town and flung it away before arriving at the jungle, now was purposefully hardening himself.

Meanwhile he found much more enjoyment in keeping his own lean muscles in condition, in spying dangerous rocks under the surface, and in deflecting his whole boatload from the subaqueous fangs, than from lolling under any such customary shelter as previously decreed by William. And as the slow miles lengthened and the negroid eyes behind the unconventional outlanders absorbed their every movement, every dark brain became slavishly sure that these quiet chiefs were really leading them somewhere. The late O'Dowd, though brutally dominant, had not inspired the same feeling. Him they had followed because they must. These they now trusted.

As for the guns, they were under the alert guardianship of William and Waldo. In Bullard's boat rested his old short Savage, William's shotgun, and three Winchesters; in the other, four more .44 Winchesters, one new, the others old. Concerning these weapons William had issued unmistakable instructions:

"No mahn use de chiefs' rifles or my shooting gun. In cyase o' trouble up de ribber, de odder rifles be shooted by Waldo, Isaac, Patrick, Michael, Ebenezer, Daniel. De rest of yo' cyattle use yo' cutlashes. Yo' hear me? Any mahn deef, I dig out he ears!"

No man had been deaf. Nor, continuously regarded by the two powerful boat commanders, had any forgotten. Except when the chiefs halted strokes, peered ahead, and silently reached right hands behind, the firearms remained untouched throughout each day's journey. On those few occasions their own rifles came forward by swift relay, went back when the point of suspicion was found innocuous, and lay with the rest of the equipment until the travelers went ashore.

Then the six gunmen appointed by William alertly scouted the woods. On their return and report that no sign of lurking enemies had been found, the machete men cut poles, erected the small tent of the white men, and made flimsy but serviceable shelters of leaves over their own hammocks. While the evening meal was cooking, the chiefs bathed and donned pajamas. And at each such bath the results of Bullard's self-imposed training were more manifest.

His muscles and sinews bulged more plainly under his skin, which daily drew tighter. His movements were quicker and surer, and, though his face was drawn by fatigue, his eyes and ears were increasingly alert to every motion and sound near by. Moreover, when refreshed by the cool ablution and the hot food, he was more companionable in the hours before bedtime. Although still reticent, he showed fewer indications of restrained temper and responded more readily to casual jests.

By night, as on the *sabana*, both slept with subconscious attention to their surroundings, yet rested without any sudden alarm. From the dense forest came strange, unhuman noises in the dark hours. From the rivermen a few yards away sometimes sounded low mutterings or half strangled outcries; but these were merely voices talking in dreams, as the growling oaths of disturbed sleepers quickly proved. Otherwise there was nothing but an occasional swooping rain squall, hard but brief, to break the peace.

THUS leagues and days and nights crept past with no sign of trouble, except among the men themselves. For all their obedience to their white leaders and to their own black commanders, some of them harbored personal animosities against one another which, at times, erupted into open enmity at the evening camp-fires. Vicious vituperation would lead to sudden baring of machete blades, murderous thrusts or swings, agile dodges or parries, all ending abruptly when both combatants were attacked by the gigantic William. His peacemaker was a long cudgel which, hard and heavy as steel, smote sense through the thickest skull. Kicks and curses completed his cowing of the antagonists, and of all others who might be meditating taking sides in the brawl. But it was plain enough that, as predicted by Bullard, these pork knockers were a hard crowd. And Bullard, watching these affrays, smiled his thin smile and looked well content with his find.

He smiled in that same odd way one morning when Kittredge, shaking out his boots before donning them (as every wise jungle traveler does) cast forth a lurking scorpion, eyed it a second, and then seized it. The insect instantly stung the grasping hand. But, though the captor held it a moment longer, it did not repeat its assault. Dropped, it ran away. And Kittredge, coolly regarding the tiny puncture in his flesh, remarked—

"Your *bena* treatment works."

Bullard made no reply.

As the days crawled away the flotilla came into rougher going. The bordering jungle grew higher and steeper, and rapids brawled across the water. Through each of these potentially deadly barriers the crews progressed by poling, by hauling with long fiber ropes, by heaving with broad hands and mighty muscles, ever moving the heavy dugouts onward without loss of life or equipment. As the work increased and the advance slowed, however, there were growing growls among the blacks at night. And as the Paragua still withheld the attacks foretold by Bullard at Bolívar, Kittredge looked somewhat skeptically at his pilot. Although the lack of hostility was welcome, it belied all his dire predictions, and, conversely, cast a shadow of doubt on his more cheerful promises.

As yet nobody openly expressed that doubt; but the subdued grumblings and somber silences of the workmen made more and more evident the fact that their recent blind confidence was beginning to wane. At length, on the same evening, both William and Kittredge asked poignant questions.

"Chief, de cyattle be ahsking when we cyome to de diggings," bluntly announced the former. "And me, I be a leetle humbugged what I should tell dem. Dey be no lazy mahn amongst dem. But dey be a time, iffen yo' understahnds me, sir, when ebery working mahn want to know when he cyollect he pay."

"That's natural," calmly assented Bullard. "Tell them it won't be long now."

William eyed him, hesitated, then persisted—

"Yassir, Chief, but—"

"But that's all," Bullard cut him short. "If you boys want to stop here and try for diamonds, do it. You won't find any. If you want to come with us to the place where they are, come on. But don't ask any more questions."

Slowly William withdrew, brow wrinkled. When he was gone Kittredge declared:

"I feel a good deal like the rest of the gang, Bullard. And whether you like

questions or not, I'm asking some. Where are those diamonds, if any? And where are all the Paragua devils you raved about in town? This monotony's getting tiresome."

"It won't be long now," tightly repeated Bullard. For a moment he sat without further speech. Then, meeting the level scrutiny of his partner, he spoke more companionably.

"Between ourselves, Kit, I don't know exactly where the diamonds are, except that they're up ahead. When I first came into Venezuela I was a bit sick with malaria, and when I came down this river I was a lot sicker; and things are foggy. Now that I'm coming back I recognize things here and there, and I'll know the right place when I see it. But until then I'm feeling my way."

"I sort of suspected that," was Kittredge's dry comment.

"I know it. The gang's beginning to suspect the same thing. But whatever I've been expecting has come true thus far—except trouble. And that's been just a matter of luck. Jungle travel's all a matter of luck anyway. An outfit may start today for a given place and hit nothing hard on the way, but if it started the same trip yesterday or tomorrow it might find tough going. Why? Because things move around, and they may be here one day and somewhere else the next."

"True enough. Well, I'm not kicking—unless we find that the diamonds have taken the notion to move around too."

At that Bullard's gaze clouded, swerved, dwelt on the obscure forest. A quiet moment passed, while the river lapped faintly at the shore and low voices rumbled in the near shelters of the crews. Then the man whom all were following into the wilderness arose and walked out, to squat at the base of a waterside tree and contemplate the nightbound stream.

Kittredge frowned, mentally kicking himself. That last remark of his had struck the wrong chord. Differently prompted, skilfully led on, Bullard might have revealed much worth knowing. Now he had withdrawn into his shell of taciturnity, whence he was not likely again to emerge.

Through the open flap Kittredge regarded his odd partner's uncommunicative back; then, with a slight shrug, loosened his clothes and lay down. Outside Bullard remained squatting, stolid and silent as a toad. In the black leaf shelters beyond them discontented mutterings continued. Listening, both white men knew that glittering promises had better become solid facts very soon.

CHAPTER VII

A LEANING CROSS

"TURN here!"

Bullard's voice, though controlled, held an undernote of excitement. His paddle, poised in air, pointed for a second to the right. Then it sank again into the opaque water overside and slid backward in the usual stroke, no harder or faster than thousands of previous pulls. But, as if thrilled by a brief touch of electricity, all other paddlers threw sudden strength into their mechanical swings. And into every dull eye shot an anticipative gleam.

The creek toward which the two canoes now swerved was in no way different from dozens of others previously passed, except that a superb *ceiba* tree towered high over the dense verdure on its southern shore. Yet the pilot's command had been certain. Without another word from him, all hands felt themselves on the threshold of a treasure chamber and moved with redoubled strength to reach the prize.

That prize, however, was not yet at hand, if Bullard's pace meant anything. He still swung with the short sway of the dugout bowman with distance work ahead. His only break came at the mouth of the tributary, where he extended his right arm behind him in the recognized signal for his gun. Receiving the weapon, he put it between his feet, muzzle jutting

above the broad prow; then resumed paddling. Within the next minute the picked gunmen of both crews, obeying curt grunts from William and Waldo, also had their rifles ready for swift seizure.

Thereafter the long shells slid onward without pause. Although every worker vigilantly watched both banks, there appeared nothing to shoot at. Minutes grew into hours, yards into miles, but the crowding bush remained blank. In its dense mass the only perceptible movement was that of gradually changing sunlight and shadows.

Noon came, passed, was gone without the customary halt for lunch. Still Bullard stroked onward like a machine; and, for once, no hungry voice murmured behind him. More hours, more miles crawled behind. The darksome forest began to grow more dim as the sun rays crept up toward the treetops. Then, at length, Bullard spoke again.

"Here," he croaked, tone harsh from fatigue.

His paddle dropped inboard. His shoulders sagged. At once all other blades ceased work and tired bodies drooped forward. But bloodshot eyes scanned the stopping place as keenly as they had watched all the intermediate verdure. They saw only a deserted clearing and a dilapidated hut.

Neither the open space nor the house was old, but both showed unmistakable signs of disuse. The ground, once trimmed bare, now was shaggy with swiftly grown brush; the habitation, fashioned from poles and palm fronds, was withered, tattered, dismally brown from rapid rot. The jungle, which had yielded reluctant shelter to invaders who attacked it with steel and created a domicile for themselves, had vindictively striven to obliterate all signs of their trespass after they had gone; and already it had made havoc of their handiwork. Now it glowered blackly down at the survivor who came back with a new gang to defy it again. Bullard's cold gaze answered with retaliatory pugnacity.

The negroid eyes in both boats, however, gleamed again as they swept over the desolate scene which must be their goal. Then they, and those of Kittredge as well, darted about the surroundings. The face of the tall white man remained speculative, but the black visages stretched in hopeful grins. After many long hours of wearisome work, the outlaws from Guiana saw the bush signs of hidden diamonds.

Although obscured by thick, lofty timber, the place seemed a shallow valley. The waterside soil, though dark from the waterborne stain of decayed vegetation, looked sandy, with outcrops of conglomerate rock. The horde of trees included palms, corks and ironwoods. All these, found together, indicated diamond grounds.

With a unanimous heave of paddles the blacks drove the canoes up on the sandy shore and tumbled out. Kittredge, too, stepped briskly aground. Bullard, on the contrary, sat motionless, somberly contemplating the ruinous hut. At length he arose, gun in hand, and took a step toward the house. Then he stopped short.

The negroes had trooped through the scraggy brush to the forlorn shelter, curious to see whether any trace of former tenants remained therein. Somehow a deserted house in a wilderness always arouses inquisitiveness in newcomers. Repelling, yet alluring, it hints at some mystery concealed within its walls. Sometimes, as all bushmen know, it may contain skeletons; and also, perhaps, a cache of raw gold or rough jewels for which the unknown adventurers worked out their lives. Until the place is proved barren, therefore, it commands first interest.

Now from that sagging structure broke a high yell of horror. Followed a medley of bawled oaths, a confusion of bodies jostling in panicky retreat from the doorway, and a booming gunshot.

Kittredge, halfway across the clearing, froze in his tracks. Bullard, at the shore, stood petrified. Then both leaped forward, rifles up.

THE NEGROES outside, after their first hubbub of retreat, stopped, turned and waited with wary intentness. Through the opening now lunged another, eyes bulging, mouth contorted, visage seamed by despair. He stumbled, fell and stayed down, writhing, dumbly clutching one leg. Behind him, scowling, emerged William, his shotgun drooping in one fist.

"What's wrong?" snapped Kittredge, halting beside the man on the ground.

"Snake, sir," shortly responded William. "I kill he. But he kill Isaac."

All eyes dropped again to Isaac, who, hearing his fate thus pronounced, rolled over and lay face downward, soundless. His big black hands still gripped his stricken leg in instinctive effort at self preservation, but his silence showed that he had mentally accepted death. And he was no quitter. On the way up the river he had never shirked work or evaded a fight with camp-fire brawlers. His lack of pugnacity now proved that he knew himself to be doomed.

But the white men would not have it so. Although the blacks stood watching their fellow die without effort to save him, the Northerners shot glances at each other and went to work. Kittredge snatched from a pocket a long knife, snapped open a blade, dropped to his knees. Bullard dashed back to his canoe, rummaged hastily in a duffle bag, returned at top speed. By the time he was back, Isaac's stricken leg was cut deep and deluging dark blood. Above the cut was a tight tourniquet. A few inches above that taut band Bullock injected a stiff shot of potassium permanganate.

"Now you'll do," he curtly encouraged. "Buck up! Stay with us!"

Isaac's head turned upward from the dirt. His brown eyes met Bullard's compelling gaze, strayed on to Kittredge's face, came back. With outward calmness he replied:

"Chiefs, I t'anks yo'. I leaves yo' my respec's. But I cyahn't stay—wid yo'—no longer. De bushmahster—"

His lips contracted; his voice failed; his eyes rolled up. For a few minutes longer he continued breathing. Then, with a weary rattle in the throat, he gave up his life.

Slowly the white men arose. In a flat tone Kittredge said:

"Too bad. If he'd only clinched that leg higher up we could have saved him. But he grabbed on to the bite itself, and so the poison went up into his system before we could counteract it."

He flicked a finger toward the still oozing knife wound, a few inches below the knee. Then he glanced toward the house.

"Must have been a big snake," he added. "Usually they don't strike above the ankle."

A momentary stillness ensued, while lingering gazes detached themselves from the corpse and moved to follow his own. Presently William spoke, voice heavy.

"It war a bad snake, sir. It war de bushmahster. When de bushmahster strike he kill. And it be a bad sign, sir, dat—"

"Shut up!"

The command snapped from Bullard, who had wheeled to confront the brawny Guianan.

"Signs be damned!" he struck again. "If you want signs, look around you! The signs say diamonds! And if a bushmaster got Isaac, you got the bushmaster, didn't you? What's that a sign of?"

William blinked as if hit under the jaw. Gradually he nodded, and his countenance became less doleful.

"Dat be right, Chief," he acknowledged. "Anyt'ing dat fight we, dat t'ing get kilt. And—"

He looked away, reviewing the ironwoods, corkwoods, palmate growths indicating underlying wealth. Under his low brows grew a new gleam.

"And it war Isaac's time for to go," he quickly concluded. "And when dat time cyome ebery mahn mus' depart from dis life, and God save he soul! And now, yo' cyattle, wake up! De night cyome. Put Isaac where he sleep safe. Understahnd me?"

His voice had rapidly risen from pious

humility to bellowing command. His subordinates started from their apathy. Several of them seized the bulk which had been their comrade, but which now was merely a lump of poisoned flesh, and lifted it preparatory to immediate disposal. Then they hesitated, looking around.

"To the left!" tersely directed Bullard.

The whole gang trooped away to their left. At the edge of the jungle some fell to work with machetes, chopping brush and roots, while others went to the canoes and brought back shovels. A few of those who went to the waterside did not even bother to return, but squatted to survey again the sands, rocks, trees betokening riches. Pork knockers are callous, physically, mentally, spiritually; a dead man is a dead man; a live one may not live much longer; so, while life remains, why waste much time over those who no longer exist?

Thus reacted every dark brain, in varying degree, to Bullard's swift counter-attack against William's croaking. Meanwhile the two white men, temporarily forgotten, moved in their own ways. Kittredge cleaned his knife blade on near leaves, Bullard pocketed his little hypodermic kit, both retrieved their dropped rifles, and they entered the dismal house together.

Within, near the door, lay the shattered snake which had usurped the habitation: a lustrous creature of variant hues, splashed with black, which would blend with any coloration in sun spotted forest. At sight of it Kittredge's eyes dilated.

Although smashed in the middle by the charge of shot, the reptile was twice as long as Kittredge. And it still lived. Its hinder portion wriggled spasmodically, and its savage eyes still held vindictive threat. Its cheeks, though partly drained of poison by their death stroke at one man, were fat with remaining venom. And as its dying gaze focused on new enemies it strove to squirm forward and attack again.

The futile effort soon ended and, with a faint hiss, the slayer breathed its last. But its ferocious eyes remained fixed, its severed rear body continued reptilian contortions, as if even death could not extinguish implacable enmity toward invaders of its lair.

"Good Lord, what a killer!" exclaimed Kittredge. "I've seen the Indian cobra, the African *mamba*, the Antillean *fer-de-lance*, and some other poisonous hellions, but nothing as big as this. What is it?"

"Bushmaster. World's worst."

With that terse explanation, Bullard turned and stalked out.

KITTREDGE stood a moment alone, eyeing the deadly thing anew, then scanning the surroundings. He found only faded palm walls, dirt floor and, in a corner, the lopsided remains of a pole table and some equally crude chairs. Whirling on a heel, he strode back into the clearing.

The open space was empty. Over at one edge of the towering jungle clustered the grave diggers and their watchers, backed by the dominant William. Bullard was not with them. Kittredge's survey went to the river, roved farther along the forest margin and detected a drab hat beyond a shoulder high thicket. Toward it he sauntered.

That bush was at the right side of the clearing, opposite the spot where the black victim now awaited burial. Behind its screen Bullard stood, hands on hips, head down, eyes fixed on something at his feet. That thing, set at the base of a great tree trunk, was a short, dilapidated wooden cross.

Its shaft leaned sidewise, its arm hung low, as if it had been there for years and gradually succumbed to assaults by wind and rain. But, like the weathered house, it was not so old as it looked. Regarding it more closely, Kittredge saw that it had been made from tough wood, neatly carved with initials now obscured by splashed soil, and firmly set. Something alive—something human, perhaps—had knocked it nearly down by repeated blows.

At this desecrated memorial Bullard gazed moodily, oblivious of the quiet ap-

proach of his comrade, who now stood wordless. After a time his head rose and, tight jawed, he looked at something else. Across the clearing sounded the dull noises of labor at Isaac's deepening grave. But his attention was not on that. Hard eyed, he scowled at the forest upstream. His lips moved and in an undertone he spoke.

"Damn you!" he muttered. "Wait till I get hold of—"

There he halted, teeth snapping together like a steel trap, eyes darting to Kittredge. His face drew still more taut. Then it turned blank.

"Well?" drawled the tall man.

"Well?" parried the short one.

Kittredge made no answer in words. He nodded down at the cross, awaiting explanation.

Bullard's mouth tightened again. Then, impersonally, he said—

"Oh, this is just a fellow who died."

"Of course. But how?"

Bullard seemed to weigh his reply for a second. One finger lifted, pointing to the unceremonious funeral across the cleared space.

"Same way. Poisoned by a bushmaster."

With that he strode stolidly toward the hut. Into it he disappeared without a backward glance. The man left behind looked long after him, regarded the melancholy monument again and thoughtfully rubbed his jaw.

Obviously the "fellow who died" had been one of Bullard's partners. And evidently that partner had been buried with all honors possible in this savage place. But who or what had attacked his lowly cross afterward? Certainly not a snake. And who or what had Bullard, standing here, cursed and half threatened before becoming aware of the presence of a listener? Not a snake—unless he was crazy. The bushmaster which had just killed Isaac was dead. The one which had slain a white man here months ago must also be dead, or long gone into the forest. In either case, thought of reprisal against it now was foolish. Yet Bullard's muttering had been charged with menace. Against what?

It was queer. Queer that two men should be killed at the same place by the same sort of killer. Queer, too, that Bullard had not foreseen the likelihood of that variety of death hereabouts, after his previous experience.

The queerest thing of all was Bullard himself. A derelict found crazed in the *sabana*, a drunkard howling in the streets of Bolívar by moonlight, a strangely uncommunicative companion during the long voyage, a solitary mumbler beside a grave at its end . . .

Kittredge stirred, shook head and shoulders, glanced around. Rapid twilight was thickening into gloom. Across the clearing the blacks were flocking houseward, their rough interment finished. Beyond, and all around, the uncompromising jungle watched the new invaders even more darkly than before. Viewing all, he halted further meditation and swung forward.

Bullard was queer, yes. He might still be mentally deranged. He might be even a sly maniac, covertly murderous. But that possibility could be dealt with later. Now he and his partner were two white men in a black hole of desolation and death. And they must stick together.

CHAPTER VIII

A LITTLE BOX

THAT night the water level of the creek, previously quite high from recent rains at its source, sank five feet. Throughout the following day it continued to recede. And all the black gang went to work in the morning with glad grins, interpreting the subsidence as an omen of speedy success.

"De Ol' Mahn, he play de game wid we, hearties!" exultantly boomed William. "He keep de water high while we cyoming up de road, he suck it down now to show we de dimahns. Cyome on, now, play de game wid he! Git while de gitting be good!"

The last command, decidedly American, might have been unconscious parroting of the late O'Dowd. But, if so, it evoked no memory of that luckless leader. He was forgotten, as were dead Isaac and the slain bushmaster. Yesterday's dark events were gone, today's were full of shining promise. Wherefore, with characteristic mercurial response to every change from shadow to sun, all negroes scurried to take advantage of the favor of the Old Man.

The exact identity of that Old Man remained unknown and unquestioned by both the whites. Perhaps he was one of the imaginary jungle deities or demons in whom Guianan pork knockers believe, or, perhaps, only a slang phrase current among this particular crew. Certainly the reference was not to either of the two Northerners who had led them there, who had never claimed ability to raise or lower water levels, and who now were even more reticent than ever.

Bullard spoke only when asked for working directions; and that was seldom, for the dusky fortune hunters knew their game. Kittredge said hardly anything. Both sat by the waterside most of the day, Kittredge smoking at intervals, Bullard refraining entirely from tobacco. Both watched the workers. Bullard also watched the forest. And Kittredge watched Bullard.

The pork knockers, stark naked, plunged into the creek a little way above the camp, found gravel, dug prospect holes, filled the washing pans brought in their canoes and expertly swirled the pebbles, settling indications into the thimbles. Repeatedly they inspected the residues, flung them aside, and tried again. At length one voiced a triumphant yell:

"Hoo-ee-yo! Here be hé! De sweet mahn!"

Between uplifted fingers he held a small, clear, white pebble which gleamed in the slanting sunlight. The other Guianans looked joyously at it, grins flashing across wet visages. Kittredge leaned forward, face equally jubilant. Then he stared, scowled, half rose, caught himself, sat again. The finder of that stone had flipped it into the brush, to lie there lost. And Bullard sat unmoved. The glittering "sweet man" which so nearly resembled a diamond was only a crystal, a token of the proximity of real gems, but worthless.

As the day wore on, other sweet men came to light, along with borts, jaspers, fragments of volcanic metal and various odd colored pebbles at which the toilers looked long. And, as the water steadily lowered, they labored all the more doggedly to unearth one of the precious carbons which ought to be hiding somewhere among those valueless bits of rock. Their prospecting still was confined to the filling and swinging of the pans; the time for building a trough had not yet come. And, by midafternoon, the wearied toilers became glumly convinced that, at that particular spot, that time never would come.

By William's order, all hands suspended the search and went to exploring the creek bottom farther up. The water now was fairly shallow, and, though it remained opaque with silt and vegetable colorings, permitted access to the whole rough bed. At length the investigators returned, grumbling, giving the white men sullen looks.

"Chiefs, some one humbug we," dourly asserted William. "Dis creek been worked."

"So?" laconically inquired Bullard.

"So be, sir!"

"Sure?"

"Yas! Up along yahnder be de pockets. De bottom, he be cleaned out."

"That's funny."

"Funny? It not giving we a laugh, sir!" The burly commander's voice turned distinctly unpleasant. "Who git de fun in all dis—"

"Oh, dry up! I meant it was strange. There are no work signs along the banks."

"Um—dat be true. We tooken notice of dat ourselfs." The big fellow frowned up along the virgin shores, undisfigured by the ugly débris usually littering a loot-

ed watercourse. "But somet'ing's trabbeled de bottom and distracted de pretties. It seem ghosty."

He wagged his head dubiously. The heavy countenances around him contracted a little at his hint at the supernatural. Eyes reddened by water and sweat rolled around at the mysterious shadows lurking close at hand.

"Rot!" scoffed Kittredge.

"Maybe rot, maybe not, sir!" countered William. "And rot or not, what tooken dem dimahns? And why for don't yo' gemmun know dey gone, iffen yo' been here beforetimes?"

His jarring tone brought a flash of temper to Kittredge's eyes, and he took a step forward. But, by a smooth sidewise movement, Bullard, seemingly by accident, blocked him; and his tranquil answer intercepted further vocal exasperations.

"A fair question, William," he said. "We worked a smaller stream behind here. This one was too deep then, so we let it wait. Then we got sick and had to leave it. If you say it's been worked, that's that. But if the men who worked it left no traces but a few holes in the bed they couldn't have worked it right.

"You know a real clean-up means tearing everything up and down, from the bottom to the trees, and the marks stay a long time. There are no such marks here. So whoever was here must have poked along in low water, got a few stones and gone out. He was one lone man, probably, and just scratched the top. You boys, with your experience and strength, can get the real stones, the big stones that he missed. They'll be lower down than he dug."

Into the lowering faces crept new light. The supposition was plausible. Many an alluvial diamond ground has been merely skimmed by some unknown wanderer who, perhaps sick, perhaps starving, has fled with small findings toward civilization to recruit his strength, but perished *en route.* The Guianans knew of more than one such case.

"So we'll work this section over again enough to make sure. Sink one good pit, anyway, and clean it up right. Then, if nothing shows, we'll move to another location. There's more than one good bed around here. But we'll make this creek show its stuff while the water's low. What d'you say, boys?"

Momentary hesitance gave way to a growing rumble of hopeful assent. Disappointment mollified, ghostly apprehensions quashed, new visions of success aroused, they were once more with him.

"All right, then. That's all for today. Tomorrow, up and at it!"

He turned away and sauntered toward camp. The workers, temporarily wordless, hurried toward the same spot to attend to various chores before darkness could fall. Kittredge, equally silent, loitered along with Bullard.

SOON the last negro was gone down the stream. Then Bullard paused.

"Leave 'em to me, Kit," he said unemotionally.

"I'm doing that," crisply replied the other. "I'm leaving an awful lot to you."

Eyes held each other. Into Bullard's came a peculiar glimmer, perhaps of amusement, perhaps not. They turned to the right, reverting to the darkling surface of the tree shaded creek; dwelt on it, swung sharply back, studied the dense forest at the left.

"Come on."

With that behest the short man turned into the seemingly trackless woods. The camp downstream, with all its puzzled pork knockers, vanished. Slowly but steadily Bullard worked on, threading a way among huge trunks, occasionally swinging his machete to cut an obstructive vine. Kittredge followed, vigilant. After awhile he found himself on the steep shore of a narrow ravine, at the bottom of which flowed shallow water.

There the guide stood briefly, looking up and down the curving depression. Then he turned left, walked onward with

sure steps, and, at length, stopped again. Once more he looked around, searching the green labyrinth even more keenly than before. Satisfied, he set his rifle against a great tree trunk and dug between protruding roots with his machete. A moment later he straightened, holding a rusty tobacco tin. Jerking back its lid, he held it out in a ray of slant sunlight.

Kittredge stood petrified. Up from a cushion of rotten brown leaves shone a score of rough diamonds.

They were small, but their reality and purity were indisputable. Held motionless, they glowed with an inner fire softer than the sharp sparkle of cut stones, but different from the superficial glimmer of the false "sweet man" crystals. As Kittredge stared, Bullard dumped them all into one broad hand, rolled them about, let their octagonal facets shoot more vivid flames back at the peeping sun. Then he carelessly dropped them back into the flat can, shut it, tossed it back into the little hole in the earth; refilled that cavity by casual sweeps of a bootsole, tamped it with a heel and languidly faced the beholder once more.

"Satisfied?" he inquired.

Kittredge swallowed twice before answering:

"I'll say so!"

"All right."

Picking up his rifle, he plodded back toward camp.

Kittredge followed, thinking, puzzling, but asking none of the questions arising in his mind. Clearly enough, his inexplicable companion was playing fair with him, so far as the existence of diamonds was concerned. No matter what might happen now, he knew where lay a handsome profit on his investment in this trip. And so, like the recently mutinous pork knockers swayed by Bullard's arguments, he looked forward confidently to the morrow.

Had he observed the thin lipped, slit eyed smile on the face under the drooping hat ahead, he might not have felt quite so content.

CHAPTER IX

MISSING MEN

MORE days passed. Days full of work by the black adventurers from the east, full of watchfulness by the tanned whites from the north.

Several negroes, bossed by the booming William, cut from thin buttress roots of selected trees a number of slabs, fashioned them into planks, and made a coffin shaped box with a perforated plate of iron at one end—the Guianan "tom" wherein alluvial gravel is worked to disclose diamonds. Others, led by Waldo, selected a spot for the sinking of a pit in the creek bottom. There the tom was set up, the smaller tom box affixed to catch the gravel hoed through the iron, the sifters given their sieves to strain the fine residue. Then the diggers set to work with shovels. Thereafter the labor proceeded with methodical teamwork much different from the individual prospecting of the first day.

Among the shovelers, puddlers and washers William waded at irregular intervals, scanning the rubble in the tom indifferently, the pebbles in the box more sharply, and the contents of the final sieves suspiciously. And, although the manipulators of those last meshes were men picked by himself, he rumbled now and then—

"Don' wipe yo' mouth, boy, or scratch yo'self under de water!"

None did. Their hands were always in sight, moving dexterously but not ambiguously. And, near noon of the first day, out broke a stentorian shout from one of the sifters:

"Yah-hoo! Here be he! I got he, de rascal fellah! Lift up yo' eyes an' behold de glory! Loo-oo-ook!"

Aloft he held a stone which, between thick forefinger and thumb, seemed tiny, yet magically radiated light into every soul. All hands suspended work, and a dissonant chorus of exultant yells rang along the jungly walls. Then, as William masterfully took the find away from the finder and critically examined it, quietude fell until he announced its value.

"Sweet pretty! Clear as de light in yo' sweetheart's eye, and worth no less'n fifty pound. Now bend yo' backs, hearties! Shovel up de big ones!"

With another racket of voices they lunged anew at their search. He swashed over to the chiefs, seated side by side on the bank. To Bullard he handed the gem, apologizing:

"I ax yo' pardon, sir, for misdoubting yo' wisdom yesterday. Yo' told we de gospel truth. De ghostly mahn dat dig dem old pockets only lasherate de ground and skim de grabbel."

Bullard nodded, glanced casually at the diamond, and passed it to Kittredge.

"Keep it," he bade. And his partner, after fondling it and viewing it from every angle, pocketed it without demur.

The discovery of that first stone wrought in William a noticeable and enduring change of attitude toward his chiefs. Misgivings bordering on distrust vanished, and thenceforth he was wholeheartedly their man.

The rest of the gang worked with redoubled vigor and loud good-fellowship, singing snatches of queer bush chants, bawling occasional ribald jokes, guffawing at various grotesqueries by one Ichabod, the clown of the crew. Before sundown two more pure stones were discovered, one a trifle larger than the first found, the other of lesser weight. And after dark the camp, previously so somber, was a scene of light and hilarity.

Hitherto the unconvinced blacks had not thoroughly cleared the ground of its brush, baring only a space large enough for the tent of the white men. Now, before nightfall, they swiftly slashed away all the unkempt growth. In so doing they disclosed the leaning cross behind the thicket, which they had not previously detected. But, though the discovery caused some muttering and head shaking, the temporary solemnity did not last long. Now that the presence of diamonds was indisputably established, the nearness of two dead men, the ill omen of the attack by a snaky foe on landing, the mysterious digging in the creek by unknown hands all were minor bygones.

IN THE open blazed a big camp-fire. Around it rose roaring chanteys which rolled afar along the creek, defying the jungle and all its destroyers, real or imaginary. Somebody, producing a squeaky harmonica, played tunes which his fellows snatched up and drowned with bellowing voices. Ichabod, naked, performed impromptu jigs and contortions, not strictly decent but exceedingly comical, which evoked howls of mirth from his mates and brought grins even to the faces of the slightly aloof white chiefs. Had liquor been obtainable, the uproar might have continued long. As it was, the place became quiet early, as fatigued bodies demanded rest.

During this vociferous jubilation Bullard sat silent, as did Kittredge. But, while Kittredge gave his entire attention to the spontaneous antics in the firelight, Bullard looked often at the impenetrable bulk of beleaguering forest. For long minutes he would gaze at it as if seeking something; then, as the tumult temporarily subsided, he would egg it on by grins and encouraging gestures. For some unexpressed reason he wanted noise. And the happy gang responded with plenty of it.

When the celebration had died out and every one had turned to his hammock, Bullard stood for another period at the tent flap looking at the sunken fire and at the shadows beyond it, stealthily sneaking inward as the light faded. Then, moving inward, he curtly asked—

"Satisfied with this day?"

"Absolutely," yawned Kittredge.

"So am I."

With that he turned in and, as his altered breathing showed, fell asleep at once. More slowly, Kittredge abandoned consciousness. The tent flap still was open; maybe he'd better shut and tie it. But, involuntarily influenced by the other's lack of precaution, he let everything stay as it was. And nothing

but mosquitoes came through the unsecured portal.

As other days and evenings went their way the location was far from quiet. Each day a stone or two was found; not large, but worth enough to keep the laborers hopeful of making a big strike, and, therefore, loquacious. Each night a bonfire flamed and workaday monotony was banished with boisterous songs and yells. And, from time to time, gunshots banged in the forest, as hunters sent out to kill fresh meat killed their victims. Moreover, Bullard developed a desire to practise with his revolver, firing at some fluttering leaf, some jerkily navigating morpho butterfly, or some similarly difficult mark. His score was high. And so sudden were his draws and shots that nobody ever noticed that he aimed always in one direction—upstream.

Kittredge, too, occasionally indulged in a bit of target shooting, thereby keeping his guns in good condition and incidentally convincing all observers that he could hit what he fired at. Previous experiences in other places had taught him that unostentatious exhibitions of marksmanship sometimes were potent preventives of future trouble. And, although the blacks now worked smoothly and Bullard's demons apparently were mere hallucinations, powder burned might not be wasted.

Thus passed the days, each seeming less eventful as steady delving and intermittent discovery became routine. Then two hunters disappeared.

Waldo and Patrick, the best shots and most reliable meat getters in all the black company, failed to return at sunset. And that night, though the camp-fire burned larger and longer than before, around it was not so much merriment. Men listened.

Perhaps the missing men had gone too far afield to reappear on time. Game had become scarce nearby, as it always does around an occupied camp. Or perhaps one had met an accident, and the other was standing by or slowly helping him back. Various surmises were voiced, but nobody expressed worry. On the contrary, several heavy eaters grumbled over the lack of red flesh as if the absentees were deliberately malingering. And, though William stayed up somewhat later than usual and, on retiring, stoked the fire for hours of further service, no man arose before morning to freshen the beacon. Nevertheless, more than one slept lightly, subconsciously alert for any call from the surrounding maze. No such call came.

In the morning William sent out Michael and Ebenezer, two more of his picked shots, to range the forest. To them, on departure, he growled:

"Fotch in de meat! And iffen yo' sees dem lazy slubberdegullions dat tooken de notion to cyamp out, kick dey pants offen dem and fotch dem back too. I got a speech for to orate to dem."

Where with he turned and bullied the diggers to work. The riflemen grinned and went their ways. When they were gone he carried on the day's business with his usual swaggerings and loud mouthings. And, if he sometimes peered cornerwise at the jungle and stood listening, nobody noticed his divergence of attention. Nobody except, perhaps, Bullard, who, equally unobserved, did likewise.

That night all four hunters were missing.

Michael and Ebenezer, who knew their real job to be finding Waldo and Patrick, speeding back any news, and, if necessary, leading all hands to their rescue, remained absent. After dark the fire burned bigger and brighter than ever, but the faces around it were gloomy, the hilarious voices of other nights reduced to glum mutterings. Eyes kept turning uneasily to the inscrutable woods and the crosses of Isaac and his unknown predecessor. Backs grew oddly cold and were turned toward the fire. And when all others had gone to bed William and a chosen companion remained beside the blaze, alternately watching and sleeping on the ground, and keeping the flame fully alive.

During that night Kittredge and Bullard slumbered thinly, saying nothing, but coming to complete wakefulness at the least sound. None of the night noises was alarming. They were only the usual short cries of animals moving in the wilderness, the infrequent voices of the sentinels outside, the thuds of new sticks on the fire. But the white men heard all —yet gave no indication, even to each other, that they were not unconscious of everything.

IN THE morning Bullard acted sick.

He lay later than usual, got up slowly, staggered slightly as he went to his kit bag and, fumbling there, extracted a brown bottle whence he poured quinine pills. Swallowing these, he returned to his hammock and sprawled a moment with eyes shut, brow corrugated, mouth drawn; then dragged himself up again and contemplated his boots.

"Fever?" sharply demanded Kittredge.

"No!" Bullard straightened.

"Let's see."

Kittredge reached toward his partner's forehead. Bullard knocked the questing hand aside.

"Leave me alone! I'm all right."

"Oh, very well."

Somewhat offended, Kittredge completed dressing and went out to breakfast. A little later, self reproachful, he returned with the best portions of that crude meal. Bullard grimaced, turned his face away and refused:

"Thanks, but I'm not hungry. Got a touch of headache. Let me sleep it off."

Wrapping an arm around his head, he lay limp. Kittredge regarded him frowningly, glanced at the quinine bottle, then responded:

"O. K., old chap. Take it easy."

He set the dish aside, armed himself, strode out, shut the flap.

"Fever, sure," he thought. "It was bound to get him again. Things seem to be thickening fast. What next?"

That question remained unanswered until midday.

During that forenoon the work proceeded mechanically, half heartedly, uselessly; no diamonds were found. On the bank, Kittredge watched the workmen, the creek and the woods, with occasional long looks down toward the clearing where Bullard lay alone. William, strangely quiet, stayed near him, one hand fitfully sliding along the barrels of his trusty shotgun, low brow wrinkled with unspoken mental debate. At length, near noon, he declared—

"Chief, we gotta do somet'ing."

"Quite right," agreed Kittredge. "This afternoon we'll all go hunting."

"Yassir! Dat be exackly de idee, Chief. Dem boys be bewitched some way. And less'n we find dem, dat make five men and four guns losted sence we cyome."

Kittredge nodded.

"What do you think has bewitched them?"

The black head shook solemnly.

"Dat I cyahn't prognosticate, sir, less'n—less'n it be bush debbils."

"Bush devils? Humph!"

"Don' humph dem, Chief! Dey be real t'ings, bad t'ings, murderish t'ings. Dey prowl de bush for to cotch a mahn and kill he and suck he blood. And dey be sly, so sly he cyahn't see or hear dem till dey be on he. Chief, in Demerara my own eyes has seed corpuses wid dey t'roats tore out by dem debbils. And I knows what I knows."

So positive was his assertion that the scoffer made no retort. Instead, he glanced again toward the camp. Back into memory flitted Bullard's warning at Bolívar—

"Fever — rapids — snakes — beasts — devils!"

A snake had already struck. So, today, had fever. And now . . .

"Knock off work!" he snapped. And he strode away toward the tent, hidden by intervening forest, which sheltered the sick man.

William's seconding command was unnecessary. Every ear had heard Kittredge's order, and every hand had

stopped. Now, as he swung along the bank, the workers splashed after him, carrying all tools with them, as if they felt the cessation of labor to be more than temporary.

Emerging into the open, Kittredge halted. For a second he stared. Then he leaped forward, rifle hammer clicking to full cock.

The tent, hitherto trimly set on straight poles, was down at one end.

Speeding to the entrance still upright, he plunged in, mouth set, gun leveled. Then he froze again. The place was empty of life.

Bullard was gone. His guns were gone. His hammock drooped, half on the floor, no longer supported by the broken post at its far end. His hat lay near, upside down, on the earth. The small stack of supplies, previously arranged with meticulous neatness, was all awry, overthrown and strewn about as if by a fierce struggle.

To the most hasty survey the story was plain. Something heavy—several somethings, perhaps—had sprung on the sick man, breaking down his bed by weighty impact; had overpowered him after silent but violent combat, and had borne him away, taking also his weapons.

"Good Lord!" Kittredge groaned. Through his mind had darted William's dire reference to men with throats torn out.

Behind him echoed an answering groan. Wheeling, he faced William himself, who, slack jawed, gray skinned, stared fixedly at the disorder within.

"Dey got he! De debbils got he!" croaked the big boss, visibly shuddering. "God hab mercy on he soul! God hab mercy on all of we!"

CHAPTER X

BUSH DEVILS

SILENCE.

Silence, increased rather than relieved by soughs of breeze in high boughs and vague rustles in lower depths. The silence of afternoon, when all tropical nature drowses, and only hunting beasts or men creep through the shadows.

In the clearing on the shore of the nameless creek flowing into the savage Paragua, nothing moved. Nothing was there which could move. The men who recently had moved in it now were somewhere in the vast jungle.

Yet, though apparently deserted, it was not unwatched. At least one pair of eyes and ears kept vigil just beyond its verdant limits. Behind the great tree which brooded over the leaning cross, a tall white man lay prone, right hand close to a long revolver, mind attuned to every change of shade or sound.

His presence there was due directly to the blunt counsel of a huge black man who now was gone. That man had said:

"Chief, yo' only henders we iffen yo' cyomes wid we. Yo' don't know de bush like we. Yo' wears boots, yo' makes noises yo' don' hear, but all de bush hear. We boys walks quiet. Iffen yo' stay here and watch, yo' leaves we free to snuck along de way we likes. And it be possible, sir, dat iffen yo' lays low here yo' might git de bloody dahmn t'ing dat we goes ahfter. Maybe it might cyome back."

To which, after fast thought, Kittredge had grudgingly assented:

"That makes sense. Go on."

Before that time, however, his own dominance had brought William and all his remaining followers out of funk. Thoroughly dismayed by the culminating mystery of Bullard's violent disappearance, the blacks had hovered on the verge of a mad rush for the canoes and a final flight. This had been arrested by Kittredge's shrewd thrust:

"Do devils take guns? If so, what for? Devils don't need guns."

After rapid blinking, William had slowly agreed:

"Dat be true, Chief. Hold hard, dere, yo' cyattle! Any mahn run, I blow out he guts! Yassir, Chief, dat be true. De only t'ing dat need guns be men. And iffen de t'ings dat done all dis humbugging be only men—m-m-m-yah!"

The thoughtful murmur ended with a snap of strong teeth and a hostile glare at the bush. And soon thereafter the gang, once more united by forceful leadership and fixed purpose, filed stealthily away into the greenery.

They went at random, for no fresh trail could be detected near camp. During their tenure of the place the men had made many short incursions into the woods close by, and now the multiplicity of human signs was baffling. After thorough search of the environs, therefore, a course which seemed as likely as any other was set by William—up the creek, where Patrick and Michael had vanished on different days.

With the hunters went Kittredge's rifle, which he had voluntarily handed to William. In response to that leader's surprised look he merely tapped his revolver butt and turned away. And, gladdened by the accession of one more gun, the boss, equally wordless, passed it to one of his henchmen. He himself carried his trusted shotgun, heavily loaded with large balls, on top of which he had surreptitiously rammed additional ammunition at which his white chief might have stared and sniffed. Each barrel now held an English threepenny coin. As every British Guianan bush negro knows, a thrippence piece will kill any bush devil.

Now the faint rustles of their departure had long died out, and the lone watcher behind the tree found his intent immobility increasingly irksome. The infrequent sounds floating to his ears all were natural. The movement of the shadows was so gradual as to be imperceptible. The sun glare in the vacant clearing made his eyes ache, and the needless tension gnawed at his nerves. With growing difficulty he restrained the urge to arise, move around, do something. At length he could no longer endure the futile strain.

Lying there, continually puzzling over the succession of disappearances and vainly seeking some satisfactory explanation, he had thought of all sorts of things —including diamonds. There seemed no logical reason for associating those stones with the loss of black hunters and the raid on the camp, for neither the negroes nor Bullard himself had carried one. Every raw gem gleaned from the creek had been openly handed to Kittredge, and all now nestled in a little bag under his shirt. But, unreasonably or not, the feeling recurred that in some obscure way the precious pebbles were somehow responsible for the recent sinister developments. And at each recurrence came memory of the rusty tobacco box buried between the toes of a tall tree.

Were its contents still there? Was its existence suspected? Was there a traitor among the four black hunters, a spy who had tried to follow Bullard the other day, failed, and now contaminated the three other missing outlaws? Had those supposedly lost men met in the forest, conferred, sneaked back while their mates worked, carried off Bullard, maltreated him to make him disclose the exact whereabouts of the hidden cache?

Kittredge suddenly arose, lips tight drawn. He sent one more searching look around, then swung away into the forest. For some time thereafter he worked toward that stream in the back bush where reposed fiery wealth.

His progress was somewhat uncertain, yet slowly sure. He had not memorized the course well enough on that one visit to travel directly now; but he had a good sense of direction and distance, which, despite a few blunders, guided him toward his goal.

Meanwhile he made many little noises; swishes of leaves, crackles of dead twigs, crunches, scrapes, of which he was unaware. And if, at his right and left rear, there were following sounds much less audible than his own, they were completely unheard.

At length he stood on the brink of the ravine. And beside him towered the great tree which guarded the little box. Mopping sweat and spiderwebs off his face with a sweep of a forearm, he stepped slowly around it, peering into the recesses between its tall roots. In one he

detected a small depression; the concavity left, days ago, by Bullard's tamping boot heel, and now nearly obscured by recent rains.

"Well," he muttered, with a half sigh of relief, "it's a false alarm. They didn't—"

There he stopped. They, the unknown, had not forced Bullard to reveal the hiding place. But had they tormented him to death in the attempt? It would be like that dogged, tight mouthed fellow to die silent, mocking his inquisitors with his last saturnine grin. Yes, very like him.

The thinker's own mouth contracted. His right hand strayed to the little bag on his chest. A pause—then, with a yank, he broke the neck string. Dropping to his knees, he laid the precious sack on a root and went to burrowing at the depression. While he was here he would hide every stone.

The dirt came up easily. The box top was bared. A clutch, a lift, and the cheap container was out and open. Inside clustered the same dully glowing stones he had seen before. For a moment he eyed them, face lighting up responsively. Then he reached aside for the new gems. As his hand closed on them—

Thud!

A benumbing shock smote the back of his head. He sagged forward, right hand weakly fumbling for his revolver, but failing to connect. Blackness overwhelmed his brain. He lay face downward, limp.

ON THE ground behind him lay a short but heavy club of brown brazilwood. And now, from behind a stout *aceite palo* tree a few yards away, leaped a stocky brown shape which sped silently to the prone victim. It snatched up the thrown bludgeon, poised a second with beady eyes watchful for the least move of the stricken man; then, with monkey-like quickness, pounced at the undrawn revolver and jerked it from the holster. Thereafter it voiced a single harsh grunt.

In answer, other brown creatures materialized from nowhere. Soundless as ghosts, they gathered around the first. They numbered about a dozen, all muscular, all naked except for scant clouts, all heavy of feature and merciless of expression. Under low black mops of hair their eyes glinted coldly, and between hard lips their teeth showed in wolfish grins. All bore weapons—bows and cane arrows, tipped with steel, or hardwood javelins, or short blowpipes and quivers of darts. Only the one who seemed to be their leader had come without an arm constructed to slay at a distance. He, like most commanders, carried his most successful armament within his skull.

Now he muttered a few more monosyllables; stooped, gathered up the rusty box, the spilled stones, and the little bag; yanked Kittredge over, took off his cartridge belt and straightened up. Meanwhile one of the brown shadows slipped away into the bush, to return quickly with a length of vine, thin, but tough as wire. This he looped around and between the captive's wrists, behind the back, and knotted tight. The leader inspected the job, then, voiceless, turned his attention again to the diamonds. After a brief look at them and a longer, slower gaze at the dirt to make sure that none was overlooked, he shut the box and tucked it under his clout.

Buckling the gun belt, he slung it clumsily over his chest in bandoleer fashion, revolver dangling at his back. Again he grunted. Four of his subordinates descended into the ravine, returned with cupped hands full of water, soused it roughly on the white man's head. Kittredge revived.

Blankly he stared; then started up, found his arms pinioned, and stared again. As his gaze plumbed the coldly intent watch of each of his captors his jaw grew grim. Straightening to full height, he faced them all with hard enmity.

A silent moment passed. Then the savage who had struck him down grinned sneeringly, moved his jaw toward the captured gun belt and, with taunting deliberation, drew forth the box and rattled the diamonds within. Returning it to its

place beneath the clout, he made a brief but eloquent gesture full of obscene insult. All the beady brown eyes followed the motions, glimmered with bestial appreciation, reverted to the prisoner to see how he would take it. The answer came at once.

Kittredge kicked.

His heavy right boot shot up with furious force, smiting the silent tormentor in the groin. With a gasping moan that bush devil doubled forward and fell, writhing. The box of treasure popped from his loin cloth and skidded along the soil. Instantly the assailant was at it with another lunging kick, knocking it toward the brook. It fell on the brink, lid open, contents littering the ground. Kittredge leaped again, aiming another sweep of the sole to hurl the gems into the obscurity of water and brush. This time the vengeful effort failed.

Bodies sprang on him. Hands yanked him back, threw him supine, struck and wrenched and clawed with vindictive rage. Something hit him hard under one ear. Once more everything vanished in a dull fog.

When he saw again, the scene was much as it had been on his first recovery. The brown demons again ringed him around. The stocky leader was again on his feet, and under his breech strap once more bulged the box. That commander now stood stooped forward, skin somewhat paler than before, mouth drawn, eyes smoldering with pain and venomous hate. But he made no move toward revenge. Instead, he briefly touched the box, signifying that all the diamonds were again enclosed therein; flicked one finger toward the bush and waited. Slowly Kittredge got up. And, arisen, he moved haltingly in the direction indicated by that silent finger.

While he had been falling, or afterward, some antagonist had delivered some vicious blow which now made him weak and sick. Further fighting would be not only senseless but impossible. So he plodded away, dully wondering why the brutes had not made an end of him. They had the diamonds and his gun. What else could they want of him?

No answer came—except one which made a chill crawl along his spine. He was being saved alive for some predetermined use. Whatever fate awaited him in the dim wilderness would not be quick death. Not quick, nor easy.

CHAPTER XI

TRAIL'S END

DAY WANED and died. Night dragged drearily through. Chilly dawn ushered in hours of rain, increasing at times to roaring deluges, diminishing again to dismal drizzle. Another night was drawing near when Kittredge's somber pilgrimage reached an end.

Through all that time, except while darkness made progress impossible, the short brown bushmen and their tall white captive marched steadily through the tangled wilderness. The clubman and three bowmen led, the first limping slightly from the lameness left by the prisoner's fierce kick, but advancing with dogged determination. After them walked Kittredge, followed in file by the other wild men.

Pursuing the direction set by the taciturn commander, the captors and the captured had traveled for a time through pathless forest, winding about with apparently aimless meanders, yet going on at a pace betokening certainty by the pilot. Then they had come into a faint trail, so vague as to be hardly visible, but easily followed by the jungle rovers; a trail probably made by animals, but useful for their own purpose. At long intervals this thread was intersected by other tracks, even more dim. Once the band turned off on one of these, walked it for awhile, then came into a plainer footway which might or might not be the one previously used. Thereafter they made no more detours.

Whither that path trended was a question unsolvable by the captive. It was so

obscure, so irregular, so shrouded by dense overhead growth that the changing directions of the low shadows told no intelligible tale. Several times it bordered a creek; but whether that creek was the one on which the camp stood, a long way farther down, or whether it was some other nameless stream, Kittredge could not know. In the first hours of travel, however, he managed to make considerable noise which might possibly reach the ears of William's searching party.

With the boots to which that big fellow had objected, he crunched dead leaves, broke fallen branches, stumbled over prone trees, and even achieved several crashing falls; moreover, as he walked he dug the heels hard into the soil, leaving imprints which, though somewhat obscured by the slithering bare soles behind him, might remain visible to any keenly pursuing eye. The disturbances were evidently annoying to his guards, who, at each repetition, growled and looked backward. Yet they continued their course without pause. And, as time went on without sound or sign of any rear attack, he trudged more quietly. The fumbling negroes obviously were lost somewhere far behind, skilfully circumvented by the native foresters.

Near night there came a short but poignant proof of the futility of dependence on the Guianans. In the damp air grew a smell, increasing to a stench. The brown creatures swung along without apparent notice of it. But the white man, searching as he walked, suddenly saw an object from which he swerved. Beside the trail, black, bloated, lay a carcass which had been a diamond worker, an expert hunter, a fearless fighter—Patrick, who had gone out two days ago well armed, and who now lay bereft of weapons, clothes, and life.

His swollen body showed no wound. His throat, contrary to William's gruesome prediction, was not torn. But his death had undoubtedly been dealt by these stealthy prowlers, whose stolid indifference to him now betokened complete contempt for his black comrades.

As darkness obliterated the trail, the column halted at an enormous *ceiba* tree whose sharp, high roots, taller than any man's head, formed a circular series of roofless rooms. There all stayed through the night, huddling on the ground, without fire or food. Kittredge, shoved into the deepest recess, was guarded by an outer cordon of bodies which seemed sleepless; for whenever he made a tentative movement he heard a sharp hiss of warning. So, after a time, he abandoned all thought of escape and managed to get some sleep.

The next morning, after plodding for perhaps an hour through the melancholy rain, the file reached a rude but efficient camp, composed of poles and leaves, cunningly situated off the trail, invisible to any possible travelers of the dim path. In it were supplies of food—shredded meat and fish, mushy fruits—on which all ravenously breakfasted. In it, too, were other things which made Kittredge stop his jaws a moment; three Winchester rifles, three cartridge belts, three machetes, three pairs of ragged trousers. He said nothing, and nothing was said to him, except by a slow, malevolent gaze from the club hurling leader. But he knew now that at least two more of the missing hunters had died as had Patrick.

His hands had been loosed, but his wrists remained stiff and lame from long bondage; and, ringed around by guards ready to jump on him at the first suspicious movement, he made no effort to seize one of those guns. And when hunger was appeased and the column resumed its march he fell into line without resistance. The rifles and the bullet belts and the machetes now traveled with the band, carried by the rearmost men, far beyond the captive's reach. And, although his hands now swung free and gradually regained full flexibility, he tried no tricks. Wooden faced, loose gaited, he trudged onward as methodically as any of his watchers.

Throughout the day the plod continued without another break. No halt to eat was made at noon. No food had been

brought along from the hut; and, although game was sighted several times—a couple of peccaries, an occasional monkey, and, once, a cow tapir—the archers in the van disregarded it. All minds seemed set on reaching some fixed objective before nightfall could again obscure their path.

ENDLESS hours of monotonous legwork, interminable yards and rods and miles of soggy forest and sodden ground, changeless dull twilight unpierced by any ray of sun, inexorable increase of weariness—these gave way at last to abrupt emergence from the crowding confines of trees. So sudden was the break into open air that Kittredge stopped short.

The spearman behind bumped into him, growled, shoved him onward. With casual malice he jerked a hard heel backward against the fellow's shin, evoking such a snarl of rage that the leader wheeled, halted and grunted sharply at the infuriated victim, who had drawn back his javelin. Sulkily the latter lowered the weapon and limped to the rear. The others spread out sidewise, forming a crescent, half surrounding Kittredge. Then all moved on.

In the short pause Kittredge saw much. The open space was a large clearing, studded by stout stumps, but free of down trees or brush. It sloped from a tall cliff to a small creek. On a low hummock in the center stood a wide Indian tribe house, circular, clay walled, with brown thatch roof rising to a conical peak. At intervals around this were several small open sheds, also circular, in which a few dark shapes stood gazing. Beyond, on a precipitous terrace jutting from the base of the cliff, was a house of distinctly different shape, oblong, with gable roof.

On that elevated, isolated domicile Kittredge's eyes paused a few seconds in curious conjecture. Although it seemed small by contrast with the broad habitation below, its commanding position gave it an air of dominance. Moreover, its sharp angularity, so unlike the rounded sweep of the aboriginal *maloca*, was typical of civilization. There, if externals meant anything, dwelt some one not a bush savage; some one from some place where houses were built on lines habitual to white men.

Through the misty rain and the wan light of dying day the party advanced toward the tribe house. And now, although no voice had called warning or greeting, that somnolent structure spewed forth a horde of savages. Through two widely separated doorways they ran into the open, and with a rush they swarmed at the approaching foresters. All bore weapons, and all came with thin grins of menace. Yet none made a threatening gesture or called a challenge. Reaching the newcomers, they crowded around, jostling, grunting questions, eyeing the tall prisoner with cruel calculation, as if estimating his strength and stamina.

Kittredge, stalking onward with neck stiff and head high, met their inimical gaze with bleak defiance. They numbered, he judged, about sixty. All were of warrior ages and builds; no old men, no boys, no weaklings. Glancing again toward the large house, he saw only a few women; and those few, standing in the outer sheds, were tending cook fires. Evidently this was a camp of fighting men, to which certain women came from some other habitation to do the drudgery, and from which they then were excluded.

Outside one of the doorways the mob stopped. In that gloomy portal now stood a man older than the rest, long, lean, hatchet faced, keen eyed, who silently awaited speech from the clubman. That leader's report was brief, lasting not more than a minute, and wholly unintelligible to the white man. As it ceased, the lank listener grated a word or two which sounded caustic; extended a hand, and received the box of diamonds and the revolver belt; spoke one more monosyllable, and walked away toward the steep terrace on which stood the incongruous house.

At one end of that rock platform was a steep slope of earth studded with rough

stone steps. Up that ascent the walker climbed, and along the level at the top he stalked to a shut door in the long clay wall. There he knocked. After a moment the barrier swung back. He faded through and was gone.

Some time passed. Except for the drips of rain from the eaves, there was no sound. All, wordless, awaited some development on the terrace. Chill began to seep into Kittredge's bones; chill born of clammy clothes, hunger, weariness and suspense. As the ominous silence and inaction continued he found it hard to repress a visible shiver.

At length the door in the flat wall reopened, revealing a glow of lamplight beyond. In it the bony brown chieftain took shape again. Curtly he called a few words. In response the clubman muttered and walked ahead. Two spearmen prodded Kittredge, jerking their chins toward the acclivity. He moved forward, followed closely by the spearmen and, farther back, by the carriers of the captured rifles, and climbed the rocky stairway leading to—what?

Outwardly nonchalant, he ambled to the house entrance, and through it he passed with unfaltering steps. The clubman, the spearmen, the gun bearers filed after him. The lanky tribe commander entered last. Behind them the thick door closed with a dull bump. And from the sight of all outsiders the captive was gone.

CHAPTER XII

BUSHMASTER

IN THE wavering light of softly burning wall lamps Kittredge stood speechless, amazed vision sweeping a scene which, by contrast with the barbarism outside, seemed incredible. Instead of blank gray walls, earth floor, rough furnishings and general crudity, he saw paintings, tapestry, flagstones, mahogany, bizarre luxury.

The pictures, boldly executed on the smooth clay, formed a fantastic intermingling of vivid colors and unrelated subjects: yellow houses with red roofs, nude women of exaggerated shapes, cadaverous human heads with ghastly green skins, brown warriors, mottled snakes and other queer things combining into an impressionistic hodgepodge which completely covered both the longer walls.

At the farther end hung a wide curtain of woven feathers, wherein orange, blue, green and white composed geometric Indian designs on a background of scarlet. Chairs, couch, table, all heavily constructed and dully waxed, stood along the level stone floor. Behind that large table sat the man who owned all this—and more.

On him, after that rapid survey, Kittredge fixed his gaze, which quickly contracted. He saw shaggy black hair, heavy black beard, yellow skin, hooked nose, and inflexible black eyes peering between narrow lids. The man, clad in a drab shirt open at the chest, leaned somewhat forward, left forearm and big fist lying negligently on the table top. The right hand hung straight down, hand concealed.

Motionless as a snake watching prey, the yellow man scanned the wet, uncombed, unshaven, hollow cheeked stranger. At the corners of his eyes came the hint of a sneering smile hidden somewhere in his masking beard. At length, otherwise immobile, he glanced at the clubman and lifted his thumb. That fellow stepped forward three paces, halted and delivered a monologue lasting several minutes.

At its end the gun bearers advanced and exhibited the weapons, at which the bearded master looked without apparent interest; then, obeying another thumb twitch, they passed beyond him and leaned them against a wall. When they had returned to their former place near the door he spoke to the clubman.

His mustache lifted, displaying yellow teeth, through which came aboriginal words of evident criticism. His voice, low, slurring, had a hissing quality, partly sibilant, partly aspirate, suggestive of a

serpent. The leader of the raiders listened without reply. Another thumb jerk, and he slouched back to his former place, face glum.

Again the seated man languidly surveyed the silent Northerner, who, thumbs hooked into breeches pockets, lounged with external indifference. As eyes met, the American's lips quirked contemptuously, glance moving to the drooping right arm half concealed by the table, then to the savages. The inference was plain enough: that the other, confronted by a weaponless white man, dared not face him without his own gang near and a revolver in his hidden right hand.

The wordless sneer stung. The black lids narrowed angrily, and the visible fist clenched. Then it relaxed, and a throaty order came through the beard. Five of the eight men went out. The two remaining Indians were the clubman and the chief, who, as the others departed, took from one of them a javelin.

"*Quem é?*"

Hard, sharp, the question shot from the sallow overlord. His right hand still remained out of sight. His eyes now were distinctly menacing.

Kittredge eyed him without reply. The words were Portuguese. The questioner was, therefore, a Brazilian, from somewhere over the near border; an outlaw, probably, who had crossed the wild Sierra Pacaraima to save his hide; a renegade, certainly, since he had become a chief of Indians.

"*Quién es?*"

The same demand came again, but this time in Spanish. And in that language Kittredge answered it.

"Kittredge is my name. What's yours —if any?"

The intimation of nameless ancestry brought a scowl above the hooked nose. But then the black eyes glinted satirically.

"Mestre do Bosque," he asserted. "Bushmaster."

"Mestre do Bosque? Humph! Bicho do Bosque! Bush beast!"

Again the Brazilian's lids grew a shade narrower. But in the unwinking watch behind them grew a coldly twinkling light of odd amusement. Lifting his idle left hand, he rested his chin in it and leaned forward more easily. When he spoke again his tone was mockingly suave.

"*Sí?* A beast of the bush am I, courteous sir? And you are a gentleman of the world, yes? And which of us, after all, is the more fortunate, the more comfortable, the more likely to live long?"

He grinned, as a cat might grin at a caught mouse. Without awaiting retort, he went on:

"A beast can not hope to be the equal of gentlemen, naturally. But among other beasts he can be a master, if he has the wisdom to make himself so. He can make lesser beasts do whatever he wills. *Sí*, and sometimes he can even make gentlemen come to him and give him what they prize most. It is a wise beast who remains in his bush, señor."

Without diverting his gaze he nodded sidewise and backward, indicating the comfortable surroundings and the priceless curtain of feather-work; then, dipping the left hand into some receptacle behind the table, he strewed a fistful of small hard objects on the top. In the light of the wall lamps they glowed with imprisoned fire. All were diamonds.

"For a beast I have done quite well, no?" he provoked. "My brown beasts have found many of these trinkets for me, and when they could find no more you and other gentlemen have kindly come far to dig up others—"

"And what can you do with them?" jarred Kittredge.

The sudden interruption stopped the taunting speech short. A blank look erased the sneering smile. The fixed eyes wavered, dropped to the gems, darted to the walls at left and right; the walls which, though protecting him, also cooped him up, far from any place where diamonds were negotiable. But the setback was only momentary.

"Do with them?" he drawled. "Much, at my own good time. *Ssssí!*"

The hissing affirmative was long drawn. His gaze dwelt now on a painting of a

white woman with staring dark eyes, blood red lips, and overdeveloped breasts; a chromo which, like all the others, was devoid of artistry, yet possessed elementary power.

Kittredge sniffed. The scornful sound and the contemptuous look he gave the flat fresco aroused sudden rage in the painter. His fist clenched again. He leaned far forward, visage contorted.

"Sneer, do you?" he snarled. "You white rat, you sneaking wood louse, you conceited worm, you sniff at the Bushmaster, ha? Ten thousand devils take your soul!"

"And yours," bit back the prisoner.

Again the incisive retort stopped the other and diverted his mood. For a second he stared. Perhaps because nobody had recently defied him, or perhaps because he had long commanded slow thinkers, his mental reaction was a trifle tardy. When it came it was once more coldly sarcastic.

"The beast thanks the gentleman for his good wishes," came the slurring tone. "Also for his kindness in leading the lesser beasts to these little things." His hand moved across the diamonds. "The gentlemen who first dug them were not so obliging. In return for your servility I shall—"

"Damn that!" erupted Kittredge, temper snapping. "You dirty coward, if you wanted those stones why didn't you come and get them yourself? Because you lacked the courage, that's why! You have to send better beasts than you out to do your dirty work, while you hide here and daub clay with your degenerate thoughts. You're not even a decent beast. You're not even a respectable snake. A bushmaster fights—comes looking for a fight! But you—damn you, you don't dare stand up and fight me now! Not with two men to help you!"

He stepped forward, fists tight. Instantly came a sharp pain at his left side. Glancing sidewise, he met the hard eyes of the chief, whose javelin point dug deep into his flesh, and whose muscles were taut for a further thrust. He halted. The tantalizing Bushmaster sat unmoved, enjoying his helpless wrath.

"Why should I fight you?" mocked the renegade. "Only a fool fights when he need not. And the more I regard you, señor, the more I suspect that you are one of those fighting fools. But what will fighting get you now? Only a swift stab through the bowels, which will not hurt me at all. And why hurry your end? It will come soon enough, I promise you!"

The yellow teeth glimmered again.

"And, as I was about to say, I mean to reward your service by letting you dance before me, señor. Beast though I may be, other foreign gentlemen have danced for my pleasure, and perhaps you can outdo them. At any rate, you will amuse me by your efforts."

KITTREDGE, motionless, studying him, felt anew a clammy coldness creep across his wrathful heat. In the derisive tone and the malicious visage was sinister significance. The inhuman creature who now derived enjoyment from mere verbal badgering would find more amusement in physical torture. And there was no way of escape—

Yes, there was one way out. His jaw muscles tightened. But for a moment he held himself under rigid control.

"Thanks. Hope you'll be satisfied with my performance. Is it to be a competition?"

The bearded grin widened as if some such query had been anticipated.

"With that short *compañero* of yours, you mean. No, señor, unfortunately not. He did not last well. But if you would like to look at him once more—"

His hand again dipped below the table top; arose, and placed on the board a white human skull.

The beholder gaped. His shoulders sagged, and he swayed. For long seconds he found neither words nor breath. Across the table the Bushmaster's leering grimace became whispering chuckles. On the wood the grim relic of life stared from empty sockets.

Bullard, dead! Bullard, already only a fleshless skull! Bullard— No! This thing was a hideous trick. There had not been time for—

"The ants," said the tormentor, as if reading his thoughts, "are fast and thorough cleaners. Have you ever watched them work, señor?"

Kittredge drew a quick breath. Then he sprang.

The pressure of the javelin point at his side had eased slightly as he grew limp. Now a swift twist of the body and backstroke of one arm knocked it aside. Instantly the captive leaped toward the table, murder in his flaming eyes. If he could only live long enough to break that black beast's neck he would die satisfied. If not, a bullet would at least give him a quick finish.

Up on the wide barrier he bounded, hooked fingers ready for grapple. At the same instant the Bushmaster heaved himself up and away, sudden fear blanching his skin. The backward lunge brought into plain sight the hitherto hidden right hand. It held no revolver. It could hold nothing at all. It was withered, contorted, immovable, turned so far upward that it almost met the wrist.

Falling over his upset chair, the cripple tumbled asprawl, revealing a pronounced hump behind his right shoulder. A crooked leg, too, was momentarily disclosed. With a scrambling writhe he twisted over on his palsied side, and his one strong hand jerked from his belt a long knife.

In that fateful instant Kittredge reeled and fought for footing. Under his soles the treacherous diamonds bestrewing the mahogany had rolled, almost overthrowing him. For a breath or two he staggered on the planking, catching balance. Then he jumped at his prey, feet first.

The interrupted attack was a shade too slow.

While he floundered there the chief's javelin had sped past, unnoticed, barely missing his swaying body. Now, as he leaped—*thud!*

He collapsed in air and flopped senseless on the flagstones. The clubman, outdistanced but not outwitted, had once more hurled his bludgeon with uncanny precision.

CHAPTER XIII

DARKNESS

KITTREDGE was sick.

Sick at stomach, sick at heart, sick at soul, he lay in a mud walled pen and tried to ease the ache of his battered head by not thinking. But his mind, restless as a creature in a trap, kept moving, seizing hold of this thing and that, though it knew such activity to be futile. And his eyes, despite resolution to keep them closed, repeatedly opened to peer at dank gloom.

He was cold, starved, hurt and naked. Cold except when an unnatural wave of warmth occasionally swept over him; warmth which he tried not to recognize, but which he knew well enough to be incipient fever, engendered by recent wetness. Starved for food, water, and sleep which would not come. Hurt by violent blows which, it seemed, should have killed him, but had only benumbed him to await more misery. Naked of every bit of cloth and leather; stripped for the benefit, no doubt, of that twisted, virulent Bushmaster, who could wear his clothes well enough, and who had calculatingly eyed his tough knee boots.

If only those thick soles could have smashed that damnable reptile before the club struck! If only the cursed diamonds had not betrayed his leaping feet!

He muttered an oath and turned over. The identity of the "ghosty" raiders of the diamond creek above camp was clear enough now. These jungle men, sent by their crippled lord to plunder the bed, had worked it in laborious but bungling fashion until they tired of the job, then informed him that nothing valuable remained. They, too, had knocked over the white man's cross at the clearing; but, spite vented, had left that job, also, half done. Had they previously killed that

white man? Probably. A poisoned dart blown from the shadows— Yes, that would be it. When Bullard had cryptically explained, "Poisoned by a bushmaster" he had meant by a satellite of this self-styled Mestre do Bosque.

It was this snaky Mestre who, in person or by proxy, had dealt to Bullard's other partners some fate even more barbarous. Was he responsible also for the presence of that real bushmaster at the ruined camp? Had he caused it to be placed there as arrogant warning of his own malignance toward any newcomers? No, hardly. The pugnacious jungle reptile, untamable as a hawk, acknowledged no human domination; its use of the deserted house was coincidence—or, perhaps, a grim omen by the darkly watching wilderness. Supernatural or not, it had been, as William said, a bad sign. And the vague forebodings perturbing the negroes had been truer monitors than the skeptical reasonings of the white men.

By now those surviving black fellows must be fleeing down the baneful creek to the Paragua, cursing it and its devils and their own ill luck, though they were lucky to be still alive and free. Their exemption from the doom of Patrick had evidently been unsatisfactory to both the Indian chieftain and his overlord. On the other hand, the murders of black gunmen who might possibly have been trapped alive indicated that no black prisoners were wanted here; that they were considered merely animals, to be slain, stripped, and left to rot.

And why did the Bushmaster want white captives? Probably because his physical deformity had warped his mind, germinating envious hatred of whites who were straight and strong; a hatred which could not be fully gratified by merely hearing of their deaths, but which craved the sight of them helpless before him, galled by his taunts, tortured.

Again Kittredge muttered and changed position. But thoughts, though somewhat altered, persisted.

Before his mental vision came again the paintings on the walls, seen only for a moment, yet recorded by memory like a photographic snapshot. Most clearly returned the female nudes and the red topped houses, both of which betrayed something of the Bushmaster's past life and present desires. He must have come from some Brazilian town large enough to have tile roofs and white women: Manaos, perhaps, or Para. And, despite his professed satisfaction with this savage environment, he yearned to return to the civilization he had known. Although a petty king, he was but a self-made prisoner, vainly striving to content himself by delineating on cold walls what he most wanted, interspersing jungle subjects to relieve endless tedium. His greed for diamonds was rooted in the same purpose: to go back whence he had fled, buy exemption from the penalty of some atrocious crime, live thereafter in wealth.

Yet perhaps he knew this to be a vain hope; knew that whatever he had done back there was unpardonable, or that these Indians whom he now controlled would not let him go. More than one man, after turning renegade, had found himself virtually the captive of the savages who outwardly obeyed his orders. Or perhaps, daunted by the known dangers and difficulties involved in the long journey ahead, he lacked the resolution to start.

The goad which first drove his contorted body over the rough sierra must have been acute and incessant. And the brain which had elevated him to power over these dour jungle men must have been cunning; quicker and sharper then, perhaps, than now. At any rate, his boastful name was no misnomer, even if his war strength comprised only the threescore warriors seen here. In this sparsely inhabited wilderness, whence the ancient multitudes of valiant Caribs had been virtually wiped out by epidemics emanating from Spanish settlements along the Orinoco, sixty fighters well directed could dominate wide areas; and their ruler could truly call himself master of all the Paragua bush. Yet why, with so many

men at hand, had he sent only a detachment to capture the white invaders and their diamonds? Why had he not despatched them all to surround the camp, make short work of the blacks, and—

Kittredge shook his head, scowling. Whether logical or not, the sneaky, snaky tactics of the chosen band had proved successful. The gems were the Bushmaster's. The blacks were dead or gone. Bullard was slain. And Kittredge was here, in a black pen, helplessly awaiting final doom.

Just where that place of confinement was he did not know; but it was not in the house where he had been stricken down. Rain fell on its dilapidated roof, dripping through and drizzling from the eaves, and the outer spatterings showed that it was isolated. A circular wall of clay, solid and high, pierced by one doorway, enclosed a bare space about twenty feet in diameter. In crawling about it he had found small bits of litter suggesting that it might be ordinarily used as a storehouse. But the door, thick, strong, firmly fastened, was much too well made to belong to a mere repository of things which nobody would be likely to steal. And its wall, as he had learned by stretching, rose higher than he could reach. It was a dungeon whence he could not escape.

So now he lay inactive, trying to subdue bodily distress and mental turmoil, and to recruit his depleted strength for the needs of the morrow. And, after a long time, the grinding headache grew dull, the nausea passed away and, although he still quaked with chills or flushed with heat, a strange tranquillity crept over him. From somewhere or nowhere, for no reason whatsoever, came a feeling that, although surrounded by pitiless enemies, he was not utterly forsaken. Irrational, inexplicable, incredible, still the momentary sensation was soothing to overworn nerves. And soon, unquestioning, he drew a long breath and drifted into fitful but welcome forgetfulness.

CHAPTER XIV

CRAWLERS

SUN shone on the jungle, the Indian clearing, the lair of the Bushmaster, the cell of the captive. Through small holes in the old thatch roof it peered at the inmate himself, finding him huddled against the door, knees up, hands loosely locked around them, head drooping, eyes dully regarding the soggy floor. During the bygone rain some water had dripped on that dirty surface, but it had done him no good, sinking into the soil. Now his mouth was parched.

From time to time he lifted his head, looking around the high wall and up at the sloping roof; then let it sink again. There was no escape that way, he well knew. The movement served only to rest his neck muscles. Aside from this and other slight changes of position, he lounged in stoical apathy.

A long time passed. If soft footed savages walked near him outside, if voices talked, he did not hear them. The only noises loud enough to penetrate were a few harsh screams from high flying macaws. No thump came at the door, no other sound indicated that he was not completely forgotten. Perhaps this ignorement was purposeful, meant to prolong his suspense. Or perhaps his jailers were occupied with preparations for his enforced performance before their yellow kinglet. In either case, the protracted neglect failed to unnerve the solitary prisoner, whose restlessness of the night had given way to torpor and vague mirages of places far away.

The slant sun rays crept gradually down the wall and across the floor until they were vertical. Noon had come. And with it came abrupt termination of lethargy.

The roof creaked and crackled. Broad bodies moved across the little apertures. Voices grunted. For several minutes some sort of work went on overhead. Then the workers were gone.

A muffled command sounded. The roof creaked again, groaned from strain,

suddenly lifted at one side, and somersaulted off its base. Into the clay cylinder swooped dazzling light.

For a moment Kittredge, now on his feet, stood blinded, shielding his eyes with a hand. Then, vision adjusted to the brilliance, he looked up. His mouth set.

A few yards from his insurmountable wall rose the precipitous rock of the Bushmaster's terrace. At its edge, some twenty feet above him, Mestre do Bosque himself lounged in a tall backed chair, elbows on knees, face sneeringly grinning down from under a broad hat. Beside him, bolt upright, stood the Indian chief. Beyond, ranged along the verge on either side, were the other warriors, standing with evident expectancy. Kittredge swept a swift look along their array, suspecting arrow practise, with himself as target, calculated to make him dodge about and gradually to cut him down. But all were weaponless. With arms folded, or hands on hips, they stood at ease, mere spectators at a show.

"*Buenas tardes, Señor Keetredge,*" greeted their hairy dictator. "I hope your long rest has prepared you to perform even more vivaciously than when we last met. You were quite lively for a moment —but a little slow, señor, a little slow and clumsy. Now—"

"Shut up!" snapped the victim. "Start your deviltry and be damned!"

"Ah, you are impatient to begin, yes? One little moment, and I will oblige you. But first let me calm your fears that you will suffer anything at the hands of these men of mine. See, those hands all are empty. You have been knocked out so often and so easily by them that they find no more amusement in seeing you fall. So now, to make you dance well, we give you a companion nearer to your own size. A weak little crawler, like yourself, but stronger than you. Here he comes!"

His hand had risen in signal. One of the brown men had stooped and risen, gingerly holding a small round basket by a loop of cord. This he now threw against the inner wall of the cell. A lid opened on impact. As the thing dropped to the floor, out charged a scorpion.

Big, black, quivering with rage, hooked stinger curved high, it paused a second to get its bearings. Then it rushed at the bare white feet on which it could vent its venom.

Up above, the watchers leaned forward eagerly. The white man must jump away, jump high, and keep jumping. The scorpion, fighting mad, viciously determined, furiously fast, would soon catch him. And then how the victim would double over, clutch himself, squirm and moan with the anguish of that sting! Their teeth and eyes gleamed in evil grins.

But those grins died. Something went wrong.

Kittredge did not dodge, dash around, claw at the wall. He did not even step aside. His body swayed slightly back in instinctive recoil, but his feet held firm. Even when the dire insect sprang upon his skin he remained unmoved. And, incredibly, the torturer hesitated.

Poised on the white instep, it was motionless save for quiverings of the pincers and waverings of the long tail. The claws, its feelers, moved uncertainly; the whip-like extremity swung up and down with varying impulses, but withheld the hook from the passive flesh. Presently it reached a decision. Its tail curled up into the position of rest. Its legs turned it to the right. Deliberately it marched off the foot and proceeded toward the wall.

THE PRISONER turned his sunken visage up toward the staring gallery. The Indians gaped, blank faced. The Bushmaster scowled. His mouth opened, but speech stopped short. The man below grinned, a hard, cold grin, and acted.

With one long stride he was after the retreating scorpion. It halted, whirled, faced him defensively. Slowly stooping, he lowered his right hand to it. With a gradual motion of the fingers he picked it up. He arose. Again he grinned upward. Suddenly his body bent, his right arm

swung, his hand hurled the insect straight at the leaning Mestre do Bosque.

"*Cristo!*" yelled the startled yellow man.

He jerked back, writhed in his tall chair, clawed to pull himself over one of its massive arms. The Indians near him recoiled as swiftly from the flying menace. But then they returned, and the panicky shape in the chair recovered stability. The throw had fallen short. The wriggling stinger had dropped to the base of the rock.

"Ya-ha-ha-ha-ha!" shouted Kittredge. "Coward! Damned yellow coward!"

A shriek of rage answered. The Bushmaster, leaning far forward again, screamed incoherent vituperation down at his mocker. Good fist gripping the chair, body shaking, face blazing hate, he spat oaths, obscenity and threats until froth whitened his beard. In retaliation Kittredge repeated and reiterated his infuriating peals of derision:

"Ya-ha-ha! Oh-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

It might be his last laugh, but he made the most of it. The Guianan *bena* treatment administered by a British forest negro, evidently unknown to these Venezuelan bush devils, was invisible armor against arachnidan pain and poison. And the palpable fear publicly betrayed by the renegade was not only a joy to his vengeful victim but a shameful revelation to his own subjects.

All at once the yellow man realized this. His outburst stopped. He looked to left and right, gaging the expressions of his men. Dozens of beady eyes met his own, questing, probing. They had seen the master's scheme fail, seen him exhibit arrant terror, seen him screech like a child in mouthy temper, seen him ridiculed by a starved captive; in short, seen him make so sorry a spectacle as to stir in them incipient contempt. Before that feeling could grow stronger he pulled taut the reins of control.

"That was a sick one!" he loudly asserted, sitting straight again. "Give him the others!"

Obedience came promptly. Kittredge's jeering mirth halted. More of the round baskets flew; eight more. They struck, opened, spilled their pugnacious contents around him. Each container held one of the big destroyers. And each angered scorpion sped at him.

He stood very still. Those brown devils up above had collected enough of the agonizing poisoners to kill any man unprotected by the *bena;* to wreck the strongest nerves, ruin the most inflexible will, turn the most stoical sufferer into a howling maniac, then into a corpse. And, although the vaccination had made him proof against the virus of an individual sting, it might not withstand a mass attack, especially when his stamina was so far depleted. Rigid, he waited.

Onto his feet they swarmed. Three ran up his legs. One stung. The others, at varying distances, slowed, paused, and were quiet, as if puzzled.

The single sting hurt no more than a pinprick. The stinger, having sunk its weapon, jerked it forth and hung motionless a second. It was half-way up his left thigh, plainly visible to all the unholy gallery. Suddenly it let go all holds, dropped to the earth, ran away to the wall, began climbing out.

More slowly, every other scorpion crawled down and off him, venom unexpended. A yard away all paused, as if in wordless conclave. Resuming motion, they crept after the first one, mounting the wall, unhurried but unhesitant. Beyond all doubt they were firmly determined to leave the tall outlander alone.

Again that victim turned a grin up at the audience. The Bushmaster sat speechless, biting his beard. Among his henchmen ran a murmur of amazement bordering on awe. The refusal of all but one of the scorpions to stab the white flesh was inexplicable; the ability of the Northerner to endure that one excruciating assault without wincing was incredible. He must be superhuman, endowed with powers supernatural. Even the insect which had stung him seemed now to be aware of his superiority and to be hurrying away in shame.

Kittredge stood silent, grinning fixedly at the crooked creature who had shrunk from the mere possibility of suffering his own dose. Although he voiced no more gibes, his quietness was even more eloquent than his previous loud mockery. And again the hard little eyes along the terrace turned to the baffled, impotent monstrosity who hitherto had been supreme. In their narrowed pupils was a speculative glimmer which might portend ill for long continuance of his reign. And the lank brown chieftain, peering down sidewise at him, bore a peculiar expression on his tight mouth.

The Bushmaster's teeth sank deeper into his hairy lip. His skin seemed to turn a shade paler. Then he looked up sharply and called a curt order.

FOR A moment nobody moved. But expressions gradually changed, the bleak watchfulness thawing into renewed anticipation. The brown chief looked queerly down at the conqueror of scorpions, glanced again at the deformed shape beside him and, presently, monotoned several words. Not until then did his subordinates obey the behest of the Brazilian. Several of them turned toward the stair end of the elevation and walked briskly away.

"Now what, louse?" shouted Kittredge.

"Enough, you son of a dog!" snapped the other. "Since bugs balk at your dirty hide, I will give you a snake! *Sí*, a bushmas— *Diabo! Que'é*"

Thud! Thud-thud! Crrrrack!

Violent impacts of missiles on flesh. A rip of gunshots. Ghastly yells. Brown shapes staggering back, reeling sidewise, flopping down. Then pandemonium.

The first crashing volley became rapid fire; crossfire, hammering from the jungle on each side of the clearing. Sweeping the human line along the brink with oblique leaden hail, the outburst tore it apart, knocked it down, dissolved it into plunging, leaping, screeching atoms which lay where they fell or vanished in frenzied jumps overside.

Bodies rained down; some toppling off the edge dead, some contorted and clutching at air, some springing out unwounded but stricken by panic. Others pitched headlong on the upper surface and were gone from sight and life. The pounding rifle fire lasted less than a minute. But in that fleeting time the terrace was swept bare of upright forms.

Cessation of reports brought sudden subsidence of uproar, but not silence. From the base of the sheer crag sounded grunts and groans of Indians shot or injured in falling. From the clearing came scattered yells of tribesmen running for the weapons in their *maloca*. And from an edge of the jungle thundered a stentorian yell:

"Fast, yo' snails, faster! Load dem guns and shoot de hell outen dem! Quick dar!"

Kittredge, hitherto paralyzed, sprang up into the air, face ablaze, arms outflung.

"William!" he exulted. "By God, it's William!"

For a few seconds he pranced jubilantly about his cell. Then shooting broke out again, ragged, irregular. And the rescued man stopped his gyrations to look again upward. On the terrace something new was occurring.

The Bushmaster, after one fearful look at the carnage wrought by the first shots, had hurled himself over his chair arm to fall flat on the rock. The chief had suddenly vanished. The tall chair, solid backed, had stopped several bullets as the firing ran along, but stood firm. Now, as the shooting below was aimed elsewhere, both the yellow renegade and the brown native reappeared.

The chief, unhurt, stepped from behind the chair back which had shielded him. The Brazilian sat up, yammering, pointing to his hitherto normal leg, then reaching his good hand for the Indian's support. Despite his cowering, some wild bullet had found an ankle. Now he was crippled indeed, both feet useless.

The Indian gave him one hard, bitter look. He spread his arms wide, indicating

the shambles on either side; swung them together, embracing in one sweep the clearing where more of his men fell. To this fate, the gesture said, the yellow man's greed had brought his people. For a second his gaze moved, to look straight into the lifted face of Kittredge. Then he pounced at Mestre do Bosque.

Clutching the extended arm, gripping a leg, he heaved the wriggling cripple up in air. Lean though he was, his muscles were strong as steel cables. And, holding his despised king aloft, he lunged to the extreme brink and sprang off. As his feet left the rock he hurled his burden from him. He himself shot straight downward and was gone. The Bushmaster, writhing, gasping, sprawled into the roofless torture chamber and thudded on the earth before his prisoner.

The Brazilian, though dazed, was not knocked out by his fall. His hand went to his knife hilt, a little slow, but sure. As Kittredge seized him he jerked out the blade with desperate speed. But his arm was blocked.

Iron fists closed on the Bushmaster's forearm, forcing it down, twisting it. He resisted mightily. That arm, which long had had to serve for two, was powerful, and nerved now with the force of vital need. He fought with vicious knees and snapping teeth. But inexorably the clamped hands wrestled the steel over until its point touched his own thigh. Then they jerked. He yelped, threw himself away from the stab, loosed his hold. An instant later the weapon was wrenched away and flung beyond reach.

"I ought to—cut you apart—slowly," panted the steely eyed man on him. "But it's bare hands—for yours. Squirm, you damned snake—squirm!"

The Bushmaster squirmed. The constricting hands now were locked on his throat. He thrashed, heaved, kneed, clawed, all in vain. His pallid visage darkened, bloated. His tongue protruded. His eyes bulged, rolled, grew redly set. His hand fell, scratched weakly at the dirt, twitched convulsively, became limp. Shudderings throughout his body ended. Still the avenger squeezed, arms rigid, body humped, full weight focused on the congested neck in his merciless grasp.

At length he relaxed, swayed, looked blankly around, and slumped over on one side. That final concentration of forces had burned out the last vestige of power, physical and mental. Nerveless as the creature he had killed, he lay breathing short.

Faintly through a gray haze came a bellowing voice, near, yet far off:

"De cutlashes, hearties! Out cutlashes! Split dey heads! Rip dey guts! *Harrrrooh!*"

Followed another voice, clearer, higher, incisive as swinging steel:

"At 'em, boys! Here they come! Cut 'em down! *Hi-yi-yip!*"

The semiconscious outlander in the pen stared vaguely, half lifted his head, let it drop. He must be dying, and near hell. He smelled smoke. And that last voice was Bullard's. Dead Bullard's. Poor old . . . The gray mist turned black.

CHAPTER XV

CLEAN-UP

SMOKE rolled high over the clearing; dense black smoke belching from the thick, half dried thatch of the *maloca*, now redly aflame. On the ground around that doomed tribe house were scattered human bodies, most of them brown, a few black. The black ones all were near the doors, where also lay clusters of stabbed, slashed, or split skulled Indians. The other corpses strewn at random across the open space bore bullet holes.

Into that unreliable fortress had run the unarmed warriors who escaped the fusillade on the terrace, the broken bones of precipitate plunges, and the swift snapshooting while they sprinted to cover. Those who reached its shelter were comparatively few; and those few, finding their roof set afire, had perforce rushed forth again with spears, clubs,

machetes, to grapple with their foes; a handful of muscular, blood mad negroes and a berserk white. The ensuing mêlée was murderous but short.

Now, in all the clearing, only one man walked. That one, a gigantic black besmeared with red from several open cuts, prowled along the base of the cliff, crimson machete gripped in one huge fist, bloodshot eyes inspecting the human débris. To each crumpled shape not unmistakably dead he gave a ferocious grin, a saturnine greeting and a conclusive quietus.

"Good ahfternoon, Mister Bush Debbil! Take dis to hell wit' yo'!"

The heavy blade rose, chopped down, severed a neck or clove a head with a dull *thuck*. Some of those thus smitten moved not at all. Some jerked convulsively, proving that they had been shamming. Some faced him inflexibly, glaring hatred, asking no quarter and receiving none. When his grim patrol ended, no living thing lay behind him. After an inclusive survey of all the battleground he climbed to the upper level.

There, in the lair of the Bushmaster, were the only other survivors: two white men, one tall, grimy, naked, emaciated; the other stocky, tattered and stained by rough travel and hard fighting. The first, completely relaxed in the big chair which had been the renegade's, contemplated the second, who sat rather stiffly and met the questing gaze with a hint of obduracy. Although the face of the latter was seamed by recent strain, he showed no sign of having undergone either sickness or maltreatment by savage captors. On the contrary, his physical condition obviously was much better than that of his wordless interrogator. Between the two was silence.

The doorway blackened with a great bulk which stooped through it and straightened, dropping a red machete with a clang.

"All quiet below, Chiefs," he rumbled. "Quiet for to stay quiet, 'less'n some more of dey heathen snuck in from de woods; and I don't guess dey do so. Glory, Mister Kittredge, it be good beholdin' yo' alive again! When I fotch yo' up here yo' hang like dead mahn. How yo' feeling, sir?"

"Pretty lazy, William," responded Kittredge. "And horribly hungry. See if you can find some food, will you?"

"Yassir! I cyan eat a few leetle trifles myself, iffen dey be here."

With a stare at the crowded paintings, he sniffed the air, turned toward an adjacent room and disappeared beyond a door. The two looked at each other again for a long minute. Then said Kittredge—

"Much obliged, Bullard."

Bullard's lids narrowed as if he detected a note of sarcasm.

"For what?" he countered.

"Everything."

The drawling word and the steady gaze evoked terse retort:

"You're welcome."

Kittredge smiled thinly and closed his eyes. Bullard arose abruptly, walked out to the edge, and stood scowling down at the crooked yellow corpse in the roofless round house. Under his breath he muttered—

"Damn the luck!"

His tone and expression were those of a man who, after long endeavor to reach a fixed objective, found himself hopelessly blocked by some stroke of misfortune.

Presently William reentered the main room with a flat basket tray of manioc, plantains, *lechosa*, and other edibles found in the region to which his nose had drawn him. Called in, Bullard sat and ate, though less heartily than the others. Kittredge, restraining impulse to cram down the first nourishment tasted in many hours, chewed sensibly but persistently. William devoured his portion with smacking gusto. Tray bared, he looked at each of the taciturn Northerners and, with crude tact, announced:

"I wants a wash in de creek. Iffen yo' don' need me—"

And, receiving nods, he picked a rifle from among several near the door and

went forth, leaving his chiefs free to talk unheard. As he went he grumbled:

"Bust my good ol' shooting gun on a wuthless Indian's head, I did. Dese popguns dey ain' good for much. Dey ain' got no scyatter."

Both whites smiled slightly. Then Kittredge leaned back, sighed comfortably, eyed Bullard anew and prompted—

"Well?"

"Well, you've done me out of what I came for."

"How?"

"By killing that yellow devil."

Kittredge's brows drew down.

"So? That's just too bad! What did you want of him?"

"Satisfaction."

Kittredge sniffed, glancing out toward the field of slaughter and the still burning tribe house.

"You must be damn hard to satisfy."

"I am. That misborn fiend was my meat. And you let him out altogether too easy."

His eyes glittered with unappeased hate. After a probing stare Kittredge dryly replied:

"My error. But you might explain that. Also some other things."

"I'll explain, all right. And you can take it or leave it."

With that defiant response Bullard paused a moment, gaze swerving to the frescoed wall beyond his partner, dwelling there retrospectively, then again confronting the waiting watcher.

"You started all this," he reminded. "So you've no kick coming on what's happened to you since then."

"Who's kicking?"

Bullard ignored the interruption.

"You goaded me into making this whole trip. You did it because you wanted to use me. And I came because I decided to use you. I did so. I used you as bait. You and myself. And the diamonds. All bait to hook that damned yellow snake. And then to make him writhe on the hook—writhe until there wasn't a wriggle left in his whole filthy body!"

"He writhed," laconically said Kittredge.

A fleeting light showed in the morose visage opposite. But the gray eyes remained somber.

"Not half enough. He ought to have gotten his own medicine—the scorpion torture. That's what he gave my partners."

BULLARD'S hands clenched. Jerkily he continued:

"Norris, Donnelly, McWade. Good scouts. Square. Met them in Demerara. Worked with them on the Mazaruni. Poor luck. McWade got wind of stones over here. Virgin ground. We were about broke. Came over without niggers; couldn't support any. Did our own labor. I had fever, but kept working when I could. We were finding stones and wanted to clean up big.

"Norris went hunting. A poisoned dart got him in the back. We found him dead, stripped, gun gone; brought him in, buried him. Kept our eyes open after that, but saw nothing for awhile. Thought 'twas just some lone wandering Indian who'd done him in. Maybe it was.

"I grew sicker. Quinine helped, but didn't cure. I got queer; wandered off at times, came back when I felt like it. Buried most of our stones under that tree out back. Don and Mac humored me, but hid my guns.

"One day I was sick again, got some funny notion or other, sneaked off into the woods. Don and Mac were working in the creek. When I came back they were gone. They'd been caught away from their guns, jumped by a gang, marched away. I managed to find their trail and followed, unarmed.

"I trailed them here. Got up on top of this cliff—" a thumb pointed upward—"and saw their finish. That yellow devil gave them the scorpions. And they didn't have any *bena* protection, as you did."

He started up, strode back and forth, face drawn; halted, and added:

"I couldn't do a thing. Fact is, I fainted. When I could see again it was all over. I crawled away. How I ever got back to camp I don't know. And how I found my rifle, or why I didn't take all the diamonds from the cache, or what happened between there and that trader's place down by the Caroní, I don't know either. I must have been crazy as a loon most of the time."

Again he paced up and down.

"When I came back with you I knew I couldn't find this hellhole again without guidance. Memories were too vague. So I waited for the brown devils to find us. It took them longer than I expected. But when the blacks disappeared I felt the jaws closing. So I sidestepped them.

"I faked that fever to be alone. When I'm alone I sometimes feel things I can't see. When you all were up at the diggings I felt that those devils were near and now was my time to duck. I faked that violence in the tent to start a hunt for me and clear the camp for the Indians. I knew William wouldn't want you along; you're a noisy walker. When I'd fixed things to look right I sneaked into the woods, barefoot, on the downstream side; got up a tree and waited.

"Things worked out right. After the black gang went on the warpath the Indians closed in on you. They were all around you, watching you, waiting for something—maybe for me to come back. When you went to the diamond tree they followed you, and I followed them—at a safe distance. And when they marched you away I trailed you all until you reached a path. Then I quit and went back to camp, cutting blazes along the way.

"William and the gang came in at sundown. They'd found Waldo, dead, mauled by a *tigre* he'd shot; buried him and brought back his rifle. Otherwise they'd discovered nothing. But when I put them on the right track in the morning they followed it like bloodhounds. The rain yesterday made hard going, though, washing out some places where we ought to have turned, and we went astray and lost a lot of time. But—well, we got here. And that's all."

His narrative, flowing more freely than at the start, ended curtly. His gaze again centered aggressively on the motionless watch of his partner, as if expectant of tart censure. No reproach came.

For a silent minute or two the tired brown eyes probed deep into the mind behind the hard gray ones; the inflexible mind which, ruthlessly set, had used all men as pawns in a game of vengeance and now scorned excuses or evasions. And presently the mustached lips quirked in a slight smile.

"I see," commented Kittredge. "By the way, were you anywhere near me last night?"

"No."

"Thinking about me at all?"

"Well—er—naturally."

"Uh-huh. I felt it, though I didn't know what it was. And I can see more now than you're telling. I can see you didn't sleep much, thinking about what might happen to me. Now come out of that hardboiled shell and be yourself."

Bullard's uncompromising mouth loosened.

"Well—" he said awkwardly, and stopped.

"Well, that's plenty." Kittredge straightened in his chair, stood up decisively, looked around. "Now we'd better collect profits and get going. There's a rich haul here somewhere, and the sooner we flit with it the better."

He strode to the diamond scarred table. At the side where the Bushmaster had sat yesterday he sought a drawer, niche, or other receptacle whence the tauntingly displayed gems had been drawn. There was none. Nor, as the two narrowly searched the rest of the room, could any sign of the cripple's boasted wealth be detected.

William, returning refreshed and reporting no new life outside, was put to work at shaking the heavy furniture. From the thick pieces came no telltale rattle which would disclose a secret recess. All were solid and barren. As he

desisted, the painted things on the walls seemed to leer at the treasure seekers with malicious enjoyment.

"Dese dahmn t'ings be humbugging we," growled the Guianan, scowling at a misproportioned face which seemed to follow each move.

"Blah! Blobs of paint, that's all," scoffed Bullard. "Come on in here."

THEY entered another room, almost equally large, wherein hung an ornate hammock of silk cotton fringed with bright feathers. Several more mahogany pieces stood about. Against one wall a rack held eleven repeating rifles, five revolvers, nine belt knives of varying makes; weapons which, though won by the Indians, had been denied them by their master. Other personal belongings of adventurers killed or captured lay about on furniture or were stowed in a long box of tough basketry. In one corner welled a small round pool of water, rimmed by flat stones, with some hidden outlet below the flooring.

From end to end and side to side the three searched, examining all objects narrowly, but restraining impulses to waste time in speculation over the identities of the lost men who had owned them. When, at length, they had seen everything in the place, they still had found no diamonds.

Again they crossed the main room, to explore the other end of the habitation. This, the third and final room, was a meagerly furnished kitchen, with a rock stove, a stool, shelves, pots, gourds, Indian food, and little else. Near the door lay Kittredge's clothing, still damp and soiled. Apparently some servant worked here at intervals, and would have washed these garments later in the day. Kittredge picked them up, then, like his companions, frowned around. The supposition that this menial cookplace would be the treasure chamber was patently absurd.

"He was crazy, but not idiotic," said Kittredge. "We'll have to tap walls and lift flagstones."

Bullard stood tight eyed, peering at nothing visible. Then he remarked—

"I'm thirsty."

Back to the sleeping room he swung, stepping fast. Kittredge began dressing. William gloomed around, helplessly perplexed. As Kittredge buckled his belt there came a strange sound. Bullard was laughing; joyously, jubilantly laughing.

"Say, Kit!" he called. "Ever hear that truth lies at the bottom of a well?"

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated Kittredge, face agleam. He dashed toward the voice, William lumbering after.

Bullard, prone at the dark spring, was chuckling and reaching deep with one hand. On the floor beside him lay a fistful of wet pebbles. Now he brought up another. And, though the light in that room was dull, several stones seemed to give out a faint glow.

"Sweetly simple," he grinned. "Two feet of water, an inch of gravel, and a snug nest underneath. Keeps 'em beautifully clean. And every drink you take is filtered through diamonds."

"Gorblimey!" gasped William, as the idea sank in.

Dropping to haunches, he regarded the raising of the treasure with ebony face ashine. Kittredge, squatting, kept silence, but watched with equal intentness.

Handful after handful of stones, some worthless, some precious, came up in rapid succession; then, more slowly, small pinches. In a few minutes the flat rocks forming the bottom of the spring were completely bared. And for several more minutes the three hunched wordless, contemplating the low, gravelly pile whence glimmered elusive lights.

Mestre do Bosque, though a liar concerning Bullard's capture and death, had not exaggerated his success in garnering white wealth from other unfortunates and from virgin streams. And, although his conquerors now made no attempt at precise estimate, they knew themselves rich beyond their rosiest hopes.

Presently Kittredge reached to a disordered heap of stuff previously dumped from the basket box and grasped a leather

pouch. Bullard, scooping up valuable and valueless stones indiscriminately, dropped them into the capacious container. When all were inside and the drawstring was knotted the three arose.

"William, make a torch," instructed Kittredge.

"Yassir," grinned William, heading toward the kitchen.

A few minutes later the terrace was empty of all life, and a new cloud of smoke was rolling up into the sky. Down in the clearing three men, heavily armed, walked toward the jungle, watchful for new assailants, but finding none. Any possible spies attracted by the bygone tumult had fled in terror from what they discovered, and the green shadows now harbored no foes.

Without a backward look they plodded into the forest and were gone, progressing with tired gait, yet with steady strength. Behind them were only death and destruction; before them a long trail, by land and water, to new life. And between them, as they marched, were deeper understanding, closer loyalty, truer partnership than ever before.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

ARTHUR O. FRIEL, who wrote "Bush Devils", in this issue, sends in the following note in connection with the story. He says he hopes fervently it won't embroil him in any "word war".

Brooklyn, New York

There may be diamonds up the Rio Paragua, or there may not. Two experienced Englishmen whom I met in Ciudad Bolivar were going up there to hunt both alluvial gold and diamonds, and were so sure of finding them that they had already made an agreement with certain government officials as to the percentage of graft they should pay on their findings. They invited me to come in on their game, but I had other plans and went my own way. They were to come out in May, as the mountain floods would then stop all operations. But in July, when I came back down the Orinoco, they had neither emerged nor been heard from; and local Venezuelans shrugged and made that casual gesture toward the throat which means: "Oh, they're dead. How come? *Quién sabe?* But they're dead, all right."

Whether those chaps ever did come out, whether they came rich or broke or floating face down, I still don't know. But I do know there are plentiful varieties of plain or fancy death back in that Guayana

wilderness. Once I was within fifty miles, beeline, of the Paragua headwaters, after traveling a roundabout course of a thousand miles up the Orinoco and one of its toughest tributaries; and en route I saw, heard or felt quite a few things ready and willing to give me or any other white man the "works". Including scorpions.

THERE is room for argument, of course, as to whether a scorpion can kill a man. You can dig up "authorities" on either side. You can also dig up authorities who assert that sharks never attack men, that rattlesnake bites are not fatal, and so on. And you can use your own judgment, based on your own experience, as to what to believe. The real answer is that there are scorpions and scorpions, sharks and sharks, snakes and snakes, men and men; and they do what they happen to, and whether a man lives or dies after an attack by any of them depends on the force of the assailant and his own power of resistance and recuperation.

I know of two men, here in these more or less United States, who, while hunting, were struck by timber rattlers at almost the same moment, retreated to their motor car, sped to a hospital, and got serum treatment together. One died. The other lived. Moreover, the one who lived was the one who was struck first. Let the authorities explain that one.

AS FOR scorpions, I've been stung, and I still live. But—

The bug got me at daybreak. My Indians and I were sleeping in thick jungle. A sudden crashing of brush nearby brought me up in a hurry. I grabbed my rifle, rammed my feet into my boots, and started toward the commotion. After about three steps a scorp in my left boot connected with the big toe. I almost died right there. I'd been hurt plenty of times before then: shot, cut and otherwise discomforted; but for concentrated agony this dose was by far the worst. I yanked off the boot, doubled up, and for several minutes was blind, deaf, dumb and fighting hard to keep hold of life and reason. Then I limped back to my hammock, gobbled a stiff shot of rum, had one of my men wrap up the toe with leaf tobacco, and lay there awhile without movement. Thereafter I got up and went with my gang across a stiff range of hills.

We had to make the traverse in one day, and we made no halts to eat. The going was tough, and I sweated profusely. That may have saved my life. Anyway, I felt fairly well when we made camp that night. But when I tried to eat I discovered that I had lockjaw. I had it for three days after that; kept working on it with medicines, and finally loosened it up. But then came a slowly creeping paralysis of the left arm. I had hundreds of miles of paddling to do, and I did them, meanwhile using my rifle when necessary; but by the time I reached comparative civilization I was in damn bad shape, and I don't mean maybe. In fact, that arm was not much good for weeks afterward.

THAT'S what one husky jungle scorp did to me, personally. Two of them would have killed me. Authorities may say otherwise. If so, let 'em. I'm not arguing. Maybe I'm a weakling, or something, and can't stand much. Howsomever, I don't want another South American scorp operating on me, thank you. Believe it or not, he's bad for your system. And the real bush boys, who have lived alongside him for centuries, don't want any of him either. Quite the contrary.

Against him, and against some other venomous bush crawlers—centipedes, snakes, giant ants, spiders and similar gentry—the ancient Indian medicine men of the present British Guiana worked out various *benas*, or protective inoculations, which have come down to our own time, yet are not commonly known even in Guiana; and, so far as I have learned, are not known at all to the Indians of eastern Venezuela. Since the Indians of both countries trade back and forth, this may seem queer. But Indians are tight mouthed, and don't tell much to one another. For instance, I know two tribes down there who make blowgun poison but have to get their blowguns from other tribes. The blowgun makers, on the other hand, don't know how to manufacture the poison. So they swap, and neither side tells what it knows.

The same sort of thing is true all through the continent. Little tribes which nobody up here ever heard about are as much on guard against one another as are the big nations of the world. So perhaps it's not so strange that the Guianans don't give away their secrets to the Guayanans. For that matter, they don't hand them out gratis to everybody in their own neck of the woods. Least of all to the negroes; the two races don't fraternize. However, some of the more intelligent blacks thereabouts have picked up definite knowledge of certain *bena* treatments and can use them if they will. And, rightly done, those *benas* work.

THE average pork knocker, of course, is not qualified to administer any such treatment; he is a rough, clumsy, blundering, shallow brained animal. But individual intelligence varies among blacks as among whites; and some blacks have a peculiar aptitude for medicinal things, good or bad, curative or deadly. More than once I've been surprised by the medical knowledge of some negro, Antillean or South American, who was otherwise about as dumb as they come. I won't go into details about those things, for they would use up too much space and probably would earn me loud horse laughs from doubters; and this is no place for dissertations on drugs, vaccines, and so on, anyhow. But, believe it or not, some of those unschooled blacks and browns down in the bush know considerable which is still unknown to many white graduates of Northern medical colleges.

Wherewith I sign off and make room for some other chap to address the present meeting of the Camp-fire gang. Till we meet again, *buenos noches y buena suerte!*

ARTHUR O. FRIEL

A READER raises an interesting question apropos of Emmett Dalton's memoirs which ran in our magazine a while back. I sent the letter on to the author, and his reply appears below. If Mr. Nix or any of you old-timers want a little speakin' space to offer additional evidence, welcome is hereby extended.

Indianapolis, Indiana

Emmett Dalton in his "West of 96", gives an account of the death of Pierce and Newcomb that is so entirely different from another account of the same event, made by a man who should know the facts in the case, that I am taking the liberty of sending you both accounts for the sake of comparison, on the chance that they may aid in approaching nearer the actual facts. Probably, the real truth lies somewhere between the two narratives.

On page 155 of the Nov. 1st *Adventure* is the following:

"One day Pierce and Newcomb rode again to the Dunn farm. As night fell they bedded down in the open not far from the ranch buildings. For a space their cigaret butts glowed in the dusk. It was a calm hour, so quiet that the two buddies could hear the mouthings of their horses as they grazed near by. For a time, then, it may be, the sanguine outlaws talked together of those obscure matters which to us they had never revealed—the debonair bantam reflectively tugging at his tiny goatee. Then they lay down to sleep. Newcomb stirred. Had he heard something? Had his mystic's nature given some alarm? He was about to rise—but all in one crashing moment his urge subsided. His view of great Orion wheeling overhead was blotted out in an acrid drift of smoke. He twitched and lay still. Pierce, too, gave a final sigh and snored never again.

"The boys who had been so trustful lay riddled with buckshot. Some of the heavy pellets were embedded in the soles of their stockinged feet. The angle of incidence had been very low.

"Very little was ever made public about the death of these two members of the Dalton band. The newspapers carried a brief account of their having been killed by a posse at the Dunn farm. The details as published were obscure. No posse ever claimed the distinction of the killing. Who, if any one, ever got the reward that had been placed on the outlaws' heads, I do not know."

THE foregoing tells the story from one viewpoint. Following is an account of the same event from the opposing viewpoint. It is made by E. D. Nix, who was U. S. Marshal for Oklahoma and the Cherokee Strip for several years, including the time in question. His statement is published in his book, "Oklahombres" Mr. Nix says:

"At about the time Bitter Creek (Newcomb) and Little Bill (Raidler) returned from Chicago, we received word from Will Dunn that these two outlaws, had met Dynamite Dick and Charlie Pierce at the ranch of his brother, Bee, and the four outlaws had gone but would return in a few days. Deputy Bill Tilghman was joined by Heck Thomas and a substantial posse, they started immediately for Will Dunn's ranch. They found him in the dugout and were told that the outlaws were expected to reach the home of his brother, Bee, during the next twenty-four hours. The officers, accompanied by Will Dunn, rode to the home of the other Dunn immediately. Bee had not been informed of Will Dunn's appointment as special deputy and he was very much surprised when the officers rode up to his home accompanied by his brother.

"Tilghman and Thomas informed Bee Dunn that they had a warrant for him on the charge of cattle stealing and harboring outlaws, and that unless he cooperated with them in the capture of the outlaws he would lose his liberty and possibly his life, as they were determined to take the bandits, regardless of cost. Dunn consented to aid the officers.

"THE Dunn ranch-house was a two-story building with two large rooms downstairs, divided by a hallway from which a stairway led to one large room above. The upper room was fitted out with bunks, providing sleeping quarters for fifteen or twenty men. The building faced south and there were doors and windows in the north, south and west. The windows on the east side, both upstairs and down, had been broken out by a hail storm and were boarded up.

"Because it was possible that the outlaws might approach from the east and it would not be possible to observe them from the inside of the house if they came from that direction, the officers decided to dig a pit a short distance from the house to conceal three of their number where they might stand guard and warn the others on the inside.

"Heck Thomas, Bee Dunn and one of the possemen entered the pit which gave them splendid protection. Tilghman, Will Dunn and the remaining two possemen took their places in the house where they could cover all entrances to the building. The long wait began. The outlaws had apparently been delayed. The weather had been very bad and hard rains had flooded a number of streams so that the country was almost impassable.

"ON THE evening of the third day, just as night was falling, Bitter Creek Newcomb and Charlie Pierce rode toward the house from the north. The officers were ready and the outlaws were sighted while they were yet some distance away. The deputies had no idea how many men there might be, as the gathering darkness made the figures of the riders indistinct and it was impossible to tell if there were other members of their party a short distance behind.

"As the two bandits neared the house, Heck Thomas called out, 'Throw up your hands, you are surrounded.'

"The two shadowy figures leaped from their horses and drew their guns. A flash of light from a belching Winchester revealed the location of the excavation in which the officers were sheltered and the two outlaws ran toward it, shooting rapidly as they came. Then Thomas and posse aimed at the running shadows—bang—bang! The two outlaws fell, fatally wounded. Charlie Pierce's head lay less than a foot from the excavation and Bitter Creek fell just behind him. They had proved true to their code—'Never surrender without a fight.'

"The bodies were placed in a wagon and two possemen set out on the long drive to Guthrie, the other officers remaining to attempt to capture the remainder of the gang, but it seemed that the outlaws' companions had either been warned or were not coming to the rendezvous, for they did not appear."

PERHAPS some of the Camp-fire cronies can help out on this. Both "Bitter Creek" and "Slaughter Kid," by the way, were names under which Newcomb went.

Mr. Nix goes on to add that Bitter Creek Newcomb's body was claimed by his father, who was a respectable merchant in Fort Scott, Kansas: "Newcomb's father was a little resentful about the manner in which his son had been killed. He said he thought the officers hadn't given the boys much of a chance.

" 'Mr. Newcomb,' I said to him, 'have you had letters from your son since he became an outlaw?' The father answered that he had.

" 'Did he ever say in his letters that he expected to be taken alive?'

"The father hesitated a moment, then replied, 'No, he said that he would die before he would submit to arrest.'

"I placed my hand on the disconsolate man's shoulder and said: 'My dear sir, I believe that explains the matter. I am deeply sorry for you, but my officers have their duty to perform. I think you understand.' "

The Nix book and the Dalton narrative in *Adventure* make interesting reading side by side, but comparison of certain common points in them does succeed in raising several questions which the Camp-fire might solve. —W. C. WADSWORTH

Mr. Dalton's reply:

Hollywood, California

Thank you for the letter from Mr. Wadsworth. I have not read Mr. Nix's book but presume the quotations from it by Mr. Wadsworth are correct.

When I wrote "West of 96" it was with the idea in mind of keeping the facts straight regardless of whom it might affect or of any hope of great remuneration.

As to the statement that "Newcomb and Raidler had returned from Chicago," I positively know that Newcomb was never connected with Raidler and that Newcomb was never out of Oklahoma after he got into trouble.

I KNEW Bill Tilghman and Heck Thomas intimately before I got into trouble—I had many conversations with each of them after I got out, regarding this subject, and at no time did either of them mention having had any part in the killing of Newcomb and Pierce. In fact, it was from Tilghman and Thomas that I got most of the information as to how Newcomb and Pierce were killed.

The statement that Newcomb and Pierce charged the officers' trench in the dark, and in the face of a blazing Winchester fire, is too thrilling for even a World War story. No officer or half sane outlaw was ever known to have done such a foolish thing. If Newcomb and Pierce were killed in the way Mr. Nix states, how does he account for their having been shot in the bottoms of their feet and lower limbs? It's true, of course, that their bodies were riddled with buckshot from foot to head. These facts can be easily verified by asking any of the old-timers in the neighborhood where they were killed.

—EMMETT DALTON

ANOTHER letter on king cobras:

San Francisco, California

May I? You don't mind, do you? But—I take issue with Author Campbell over a statement about king cobras in his story, "The Lord of the Valley," in the February first number of your magazine.

I am just home from living in Bangkok. Snakes happen to be a particular hobby, when they're in concrete enclosures and not wiggling across the golf course. The king cobra is big, all right. The females frequently run to seventeen feet. Kings are speedy and they're about the only creature in the animal kingdom that will give unprovoked attack, but—their bite does not bring "instant death."

I think Author Campbell was in error because the king's bite is usually fatal, due to the location of the bite, even when serum is administered. A king travels with a good three feet of its body free of the ground, and when it strikes it attempts to fasten its fangs in the back of its victim's neck. Swift death follows of course; but not, instant death. On the other hand, if a king bites a leg, an arm, or any other non-vital spot, considerable time will elapse before death. If the sufferer is fortunate enough to possess serum, or can get to one of the hundred of emergency stations maintained by the Siamese government, where treatments are administered free of charge, death will not result. The bite of a king is no more deadly than the bite of an ordinary cobra.

The Pasteur Institute in Bangkok has some first class kings, nine in all, that "give" their venom once a month for serum purposes. Major Pra Charoen, who is in charge of this branch of the work for the

Institute, happens to be one of my husband's closest friends. The Khun Pra is my chief source of snake information.

A little stationary store in Si Phya Road sells *Adventure*. Every two weeks, when the mails were regular, a little boy trotted into my husband's office with *Adventure* neatly tied up in brown paper and pink string. We are both cover-to-cover readers and we have taken *Adventure* with us into some pretty odd parts of the East—confidentially Bangkok is the oddest—and it has been a great comfort.

Your stories exhibit excellent style and you justly pride yourself on your attention to details but—you do sort of prod your readers into looking for errors. It took ten years of prodding before I found one.

—DOROTHY BRANDON

IN LIEU of an informal note, the following biographical sketch of the author of "Two Rounds", in this issue, will have to serve as an introduction to the members of the Fire. We hope, however, that when Colonel Gompertz makes his next appearance in our pages he will come before us here to pay his respects in person.

Lt.-Col. M. L. A. Gompertz is an officer in the Indian Army, on the point of commanding his battalion, the 3rd Battalion of the Baluch Regiment, at present stationed in Waziristan on the North West Frontier of India. During the war, Colonel Gompertz saw service in East Africa, and later was employed in India in training the young officers.

He was on active service again in 1919 and 1920 in Waziristan, later doing his course at the Staff College, Quetta, which he followed up by a term of Staff work at Northern Command Headquarters, Rawalpindi. Thus for the past twenty-five years, his life has been spent among the people of India, and for the greater part of that time among the inhabitants of the North.

HIS men, in the very early days of his service, when he was still a young lieutenant, gave him the name of "Ganpat"—the god of good fortune—as being the nearest approach they could make to his real name, and hence Colonel Gompertz chose this as the pseudonym, under which he writes.

He is the author of eleven novels, all but two of which have their setting in India, and his two travel books, "The Road to Lamaland," and "Magic Ladakh," are chronicles of his journeyings among the high snows beyond Kashmir. He is something of an authority on the mountains of Central Asia and is a founder member of the Himalayan Club.

Another subject—buzzards—on which the testimony of impartial observers doesn't seem to jibe. However, the word "impartial" doesn't mean much, for as soon as phenomena register on our senses, and are in turn tucked away for future reference in our memory, we can no longer justly lay claim to that epithet. Psychologists have long pointed out that probably no two people perceive a given thing exactly alike, anyway.

Port Arthur, Texas

Mr. Davis Quinn gets at the nub of that buzzard question. Many who live in buzzard country *have* never seen these birds either hop or devour living things. Just as those specially on the watch for it have never chanced on the killing of a rattler by a roadrunner. Even I have seen the latter but twice in about forty years; while I know persons who describe the occurrence too minutely not to have witnessed it, probably the dozen or more times they claim.

In this section, though buzzards are not so plentiful as in former years, opportunities for watching them are painfully abundant. Painfully is right; because of their habits. I will go Mr. Quinn one better—something I have said in print a number of times: It is my belief, based on hundreds of vulture nest, eggs and young studies, that the big fellows *never* feed their newly hatched babies carrion. Unless as a matter of dire necessity. How many of your "testifyers" have *raised* buzzards? *I* have. They are very affectionate creatures; like all tamed predatory birds. Roughly, until they are old enough to begin running to meet their parents, there is only the faintest odor, *or absolutely none at all, in normal conditions, about a buzzard's nest, according to my numerous and highly varied personal experiences.* But as they grow large enough for strong meats, phew!

BESIDES new born stock, and crippled mammals small enough to be readily handled, fledgling birds are preyed upon to an extent that usually ends general nesting near where the vultures establish a colony, and even a nesting pair takes up in a thicket, swamp or among rocks. I have helplessly seen mocking birds, shrikes, brown thrashers, catbirds, jays, great-tailed and boat-tailed grackles, red-winged blackbirds, cowbirds, young willets and others caught and carried away. There isn't a species of small bird, in fact, given to nesting in open lands, or in small timber mottes or hedges surrounded by open prairie or fields, which does not suffer during the period that buzzards have infants of their own to feed. Especially since their natural foods have become scarcer, due to more sanitary disposal of dead animals, and other refuse, than in the good old days of yore.

Incidentally: I was a member of *one* picnic party very thoroughly broken up, about twenty years ago, when a buzzard dropped what he was carrying sufficiently close to our own projected dinner to send some twelve or fourteen badly nauseated persons tearing from under a special group of large trees.

Things would have been bad enough in any case. But there was an outbreak of charbon among local cattle. We just gingerly gathered up the ends of our tablecloth, let everything slide off, threw it on a fire, got back in our boat, and chugged for the nearest eating place—a good long ways, too.

It is one of the commonest sights of these prairies, and the ones further back from the coast, to see a pair of mocking birds, shrikes, or some of the blackbirds, frantically chasing a big blackish marauder who has just nabbed one of their offspring—generally on its very first venture into the world beyond its home nest. Bee martins and purple martins are just as fearless about trying to damage the eyes of a vulture which has actually captured one of the little kingbirds or swallows, or is on the watch to pounce where a youngling balances on still uncertain wings. Having often written of the procedure followed, I will not go into it now. But if the buzzards, in their nefarious team work, do not *reason*—no creature does.

As I say, any one who wishes to see for himself has only to spend from April to August down here in the coastal marshes. He can get all the verification of his own observations that he may want from farmers and cattle raisers of the same locality, and from hunters, trappers and fishermen of the bayous and coastal lakes.

Vultures *will* hop, in a peculiarly awkward, sidelong manner, aided by their wings, to get out of the way of a belligerent companion, or when accepting a challenge to brief (usually) exchanges of hostilities, to cover shortage of lighting exactly beside an objective, to move slightly when disturbed insufficiently to make them take wing, and in like cases.

—B. M. REID

OUR Camp-fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ASK Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Flying

HERE are some good questions to ask a flying school before you pay your matriculation fee.

Request:—"I am undecided whether to go to college or take up aviation. My parents will stake me to a complete course if it should prove practical.

1. What is your opinion of such a course compared to a college education?

2. What questions should I ask the schools to whom I write for prospectuses?"

—R. S. THOMPSON, Washington, D. C.

Reply, by Lieut. Jeffrey R. Starks:—1. You should be envied for being able to go to college. Outside the financial advantage in later years that a college education might bring one, it usually results in being able to appreciate life a lot better. However, you never can tell. If you are only lukewarm about college and really serious about an education in aeronautics, the latter course might be best. But ask yourself this: "Am I crazy to get into aeronautics because of 'thrills, adventure, popularity, big pay, etc.' or am I anxious to get into it because it offers something for the future and because it will always be interesting? Am I willing to work just as hard as I would if I went through college? Am I willing to go through the thrills of learning to fly and then face the discouragements attendant on landing a job flying? Will I look or be mature enough when I get my Transport Pilot's license to be able to land a job?"

If you still want to learn to fly, why do so by all means. Say that it takes a year to go through a good course and another year to connect with a job, you will then be earning money two years before you would were you to go through college. In fact, you could afford to work for a very small salary for the first two years and still be ahead of the game financially.

According to the Dept. of Commerce, the average cost of a transport pilot course at an *approved* school is $4,304.

2. Ask the schools you intend investigating the following questions:

Is your school an *approved* one?

How many students per training plane?

How many types of airplanes and motors have you in your classrooms or shops?

How many hours solo and instruction on large cabin planes do I get?

How much on multi-motored planes?

How much on night flying, and in what type planes?

Is this night flying cross country? Or local landings? Or both?

How much practise on "blind flying" (hooded cockpit work) do I get?

How much is your course? How do I pay? Is board at dormitories included in that?

If there are no dormitories attached to your school, how much is board in the nearest town, how far is that town, and what transportation facilities to and from the airport are there and what does it cost?

Then pick the one that looks best to you. Ask any *experienced* flyer of good judgment which looks best to him.

First Aid

ESSENTIALS for the tropical hiking kit.

Request:—"Will you please outline a minimum first aid kit for use in the tropics—to be carried in hiker's pack?"

—CHAS. H. LEWIS, Denver, Colorado

Reply, by Dr. Claude P. Fordyce:—I would carry in compact for the pack sack the following minimum essentials in first aid equipment:

Laxative.
Aromatic spirits of ammonia.
Halazone. For purifying water. (The Abbott Laboratories, Chicago.)
Tincture iodine in ampoules.
Chlorazene antiseptic. (The Abbott Labs.)
1 sq. yd. sterile gauze.
1 oz. cotton.
1 roll 1 in. x 5 yds. adhesive plaster.

Add to this the items described in my circular on tropical hygiene. The subject of snake bite demands special description and you will find this in the enclosure. Serum can now be secured from the H. K. Mulford Co., Philadelphia. Pa.

Bayonet

SAW-TOOTH models were introduced by the Central Powers not because they were more deadly—for they were not—but because German efficiency combined the bayonet with a handy tool.

Request:—"To what extent was the saw-tooth bayonet used in the World War? Was it used only by the so-called pioneer troops, or was it used alike by the infantry also? Was it intended to be a weapon of combat? Or was it intended to be a form of a tool, as sometimes used by sappers in their work?"

—JAMES E. FITZGERALD, Lexington, Massachusetts

Reply, by Mr. Robert E. Gardner:—Among the forty-one bayonets developed or used by the Central Powers none is more interesting than the saw-tooth. I am familiar with two models, both of which are alike, in that the serration starts about six inches from the double-edged point. While essentially a weapon, the Germans, with characteristic efficiency, combined with it the tool. There is nothing particularly vicious about the saw-tooth, because by the time the teeth would engage an enemy the point would more than likely have inflicted a mortal wound, and a few scratches more would not matter.

Not having at hand information as to its distribution, I called upon two veterans of the imperial German army who had a difference of opinion. Both were infantrymen. One stated that one saw-tooth was carried in each squad. The other is equally positive that none were issued within his company. Frankly, I don't know to whom they were issued, but I am positive that they were not confined to engineer or pioneer troops only. Certain infantry troops were likewise so armed.

Australia

NO ALIENS admitted until after the depression.

Request:—"Australia has always been my goal, as a place to settle down. I am a young man, single. That does not stop me from trying to garner a little advance information, on general conditions, before taking any steps to go there."

—J. M. JENOULIS, San Francisco, California

Reply, by Mr. Alan Foley:—Your letter arrived safely but I deferred answering it because of the likelihood that migration to this country might be stopped until the depression lifts.

I now have to advise you that migration has definitely been prohibited to this country. This is only a temporary measure, but there is little prospect of the embargo being removed for a year or two.

Also when it is lifted I would not advise you to contemplate migrating here, due to the fact that our depression is much more acute than in U. S. A. because we have no important secondary industries which could help to rehabilitate our loss of revenue occasioned by the phenomenal fall in the price of primary products.

Sorry to paint a gloomy picture, but in your own interests I must dissuade you from your project.

Pole Vaulting

WALKING on the hands is a good way to strengthen the shoulders for this strenuous upside-down exercise.

Request:—"Please give me some information concerning pole vaulting. 1. Method of holding pole; 2. How to judge distance of run; 3. When to spring." —B. SULLIVAN, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Jackson Scholz:—Pole vaulting is such a complete science in itself that "full information" would be much too complete to cover in a letter. The American Sports Publishing Co., at 45 Rose St., New York City, publish a book on the subject which I am sure would include everything you wish to know.

A polo vaulter, of course, requires plenty of speed to gain momentum. He must also be unusually well developed about the arms and shoulders, a development which may be gained by setting-up exercises. Most pole vaulters find the exercise of standing and walking on their hands to be the finest developer for this event.

1. The pole is gripped at approximately the height of the bar, by the right hand. The left hand is held lower to carry the weight of the pole while running. At the moment of leaving the ground the left hand is shifted up under the right so that both hands are together, thereby insuring the pull-up at a single point on the pole. While running the pole is carried, point about level with the head, upon the right side of the body.

2. A leap is required as the vaulter leaves the ground. He should allow his momentum to swing his body up on the right side of the pole. When the pole is almost vertical, he should pull his body upward with all the strength in his arms and shoulders, shooting his feet, if possible, above his head, and thereby over the bar. At this point the vaulter should twist his body so that he is facing *downward* as he crosses the bar. While in this position he should shove violently downward on the pole before releasing his grip in order that the added thrust may give him a bit of additional height and also throw him clear of the bar.

3. A take-off is essential. The vaulter must leave the ground from the same point and with the same foot each time. Place the point of the pole in the slot, hold the pole above your head, then stand as far away as possible without removing the point from the slot. Mark the point where your feet are at this time, and then measure your run so that you will always leap from that spot.

Sailors' Snug Harbor

OLD men of the sea who are lucky enough to get in are known as "Snugs" in the neighborhood of Kill Von Kull where, without raising a hand, they live like lords of the manor.

Request:—"I am writing to you to see if you can tell me about Snug Harbor.

In the old days I heard a lot about it, but don't remember much about it now. I am getting up in years—75 next June—and it is getting harder to make a living all the time.

I went to sea in the '70's and '80's but have not been for a good many years."

—SAM HALL, Independence, Oregon

Reply, by Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg:—The Sailors' Snug Harbor was founded by a Robert Randall of New York City, who, under a will drawn by Alexander Hamilton in about 1800 or 1801, left practically his entire estate for the establishment and maintenance of a home for sailors. At the time the estate consisted chiefly of a small farm of about fifteen or twenty acres around, or just off from, lower Fifth Avenue, in New York City.

The Harbor is now located on Staten Island and is administered by a board of trustees provided under the terms of the will, comprised of persons occupying certain positions designated under the terms of the Randall will. The will was so drawn that the property can not be disposed of.

The present property where the home is now located on the banks of the Kill von Kull was purchased in 1831, and to date over six thousand seamen have been cared for there. The requirements for entry are citizenship of the United States and five years' service in the American merchant marine. The age requirement is sixty years unless the sailor is incapacitated for work. Canal boatmen are not admitted under these provisions.

The home is situated on a high bank, and across the highway, down the bank, is the Kill Von Kull, with New Jersey just across. The hundred and forty acres of land are largely taken up with lawns, flower beds, shade trees and the many fine large buildings.

THE main buildings used for dormitories and dining rooms are connected with corridors and form sort of one huge building. The rooms are all bright and cheerful, well heated and lighted, and scrupulously clean. Two persons are assigned to a room. The church therein is of the Episcopalian faith. Whenever the present minister resigns, or for any reason becomes incapacitated, a Presbyterian minister will take his place. The alternating between the Episcopalian and the Presbyterian faiths results, I presume, from the terms of the will, under which the rector of the Trinity Church and the minister of the First Presbyterian Church of New York are members of the board of trustees. Each Sunday an exceptionally good choir sings at the church at a cost of $200 per Sunday.

There is also a small Catholic church there, but no regular services are held therein, the sailors going out to church, although residents of the Catholic faith are buried from there.

There is also a fine theater where dramas, moving picture shows, vaudeville, etc., are given at intervals. There is a fine large library, and also a recreation hall for card playing, etc., while the dining rooms accommodate over 900 at one time. There are two hundred employees at the Harbor, as the sailors are not required to do any work, and if any of them do care to work they are paid for whatever service they perform.

In the kitchen no food is kept from one meal to another and warmed over—the left-overs all go to the wonderful stock of pigs which are kept there. There are dish washing machines and everything of the most modern type for convenient work. The herd of cows are Holsteins. It has its own power plant composed of three large dynamos which supply electricity and heat. They have their own fire fighting equipment. They purchase their potatoes by the carload, their sugar by the ton, and everything else by the same method.

They have a large hospital which includes a con-

tagious ward, mental ward, etc. There seem to be few rules or regulations, except that the lights go out at ten in the summer and nine in the winter. Their meal schedule is as follows: Coffee about five or five-thirty, breakfast between six and seven, coffee again about nine-thirty, lunch at noon, coffee again at three or three-thirty, and dinner at night.

That is about all I can tell you about the Sailors' Snug Harbor, and would suggest that you write Captain Cornett, care of Sailors' Snug Harbor, Staten Island, N. Y., who will be glad to advise you more as to your chances of admittance.

Musk Ox

BEYOND the last outposts of the Mounted Police the shaggy musk ox enjoys his cold domain. He is quiet and harmless, a gallant defender of the weaker members of the herd, and can wax fat on moss and Arctic grass.

Request:—"I am interested in the musk oxen and would be much obliged if you would answer some questions concerning them:

1. Are the musk oxen becoming extinct?
2. About what is their approximate number?
3. Do they migrate from one district to another, or stay near one locality?
4. Where are they most numerous?
5. What size and weight do they attain?

—G. D. MEEK, Everett, Washington

Reply, by Mr. Herbert Patrick Lee:—1. Musk oxen have undoubtedly decreased in number in Arctic Canada during the past fifty years, due to the introduction of firearms among the natives and also to the inroads of white hunters. I do not believe, however, that there is any danger of the musk oxen becoming extinct so long as the Canadian government, which now prohibits the hunting of musk oxen except in the case of dire necessity, exercises provisions for their protection.

2. It is impossible to estimate even the approximate number of the existing musk oxen herds, as they are scattered over regions totally uninhabited, such as parts of Ellesmere Island, North Devon Island, and elsewhere, where the sole inhabitants are small detachments of Royal Canadian Mounted Police and one or two families of Eskimos taken by them from other regions.

3. Musk oxen do migrate, but not to the extent of the caribou. Herds will migrate to upper, inland valleys in the spring, and come down to lower grass lands fronting the south in the fall and winter. In winter, of course, they depend upon the high winds to blow away the snow from the patches of rough grasses, mosses and sedges on which they live.

4. The most numerous herds, no doubt, are located on Ellesmere Island and Melville Island. These herds, however, are usually small groups of from five to thirty animals, seldom more. There are also herds in Peary Land, at the far Northern tip of Greenland, and a few left on the mainland of Canada east of the Coppermine River.

5. The musk oxen are smaller than the buffalo, but their thick woolly coat gives them an impression of considerable size and weight. The head, with its massive curved horns, is very heavy, in some cases one-quarter the weight of the entire carcass. Generally speaking, the musk oxen are about the size of a small steer, though the bulls attain greater weight.

As a rule the musk oxen are quiet and harmless. When attacked they form a half-circle, with the bulls on the outside, calves and females on the inside, and greet their enemies with lowered horns. I have seen several herds in this formation on Ellesmere Island and there is no doubt that in this way they repel attacks by wolves and possibly polar bears, which otherwise would exterminate them.

The meat, by the way, is very similar to ordinary cow's meat and has none of the musk odor popularly ascribed to it. Care must be taken, however, to skin the animals as soon as they are killed.

Fish-hook

WHAT to use for bluefish.

Request:—"What type of metal squid is preferable for bluefish, one with single or double or gang hooks attached to the end, or hook attached halfway up the body of the squid?"

—PAUL M. EICKS, Forest Hills, New York

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—For my own personal use for bluefish I like the 4-inch polished tin metal squid, with 5/0 hook better than anything else. The treble hooks hook the most strikes, but a single hook holds the fish best.

Seal

A POST OFFICE advertising label that was mistaken for a stamp.

Request:—"I take the liberty of writing in regard to an old stamp, or rather an old seal, resembling an envelop stamp, in my possession for about 38 years. It is printed in black on tan paper, oval in shape, about 1⅝ inches long and 1¼ inches high. In the foreground is shown a galloping horse and rider, to the right is an old style locomotive and cars, to the left in the distance is a steamboat (or building) while either side shows a star. Across the top are the words 'Post Office Department' and at the bottom 'United States of America' and outside the oval line is 'With Celerity, Certainty and Security'. Any information available of this specimen will be gratefully received."

—R. W. ALTER, Kirkwood, Missouri

Reply, by Mr. H. A. Davis:—The label you describe is one got out by the Postoffice Dept. in the early days, when mail matter was also carried by private concerns. The galloping horse, locomotive

and boat are intended to show that the Government had all the facilities for quick delivery of mail matter and was to encourage the patronizing of the Government service instead of private delivery companies who might not be reliable.

Later the Government passed a law prohibiting private parties from carrying mail matter in competition with the Postal Department.

The label is of no value to a philatelist or to any one unless he or she collects advertising labels of this nature. It would bring only a few cents in the open market.

Motor Camp

EVERY article for the camp comfort of four people crossing the country is included in the list below:

Request:—"We are four starting on a sightseeing trip of the U. S. A., to end in California. The children's ages are boy of nine and girl of seven. What equipment do you consider necessary?"
—CLARENCE INGHAM DERRY, Demarest, New Jersey

Reply, by Major Chas. G. Percival:—You need a good tent of the umbrella type, with steel telescoping poles.

2 air beds (25″ by 48″), using cushions of car to make the full 72 inches length at pillow end
2 sleeping bags (30″ by 72″)
1 gasoline vapor stove (2 burner-portable)
1 nested aluminum cooking set
1 tourist kitchenette for running board; this contains ice chest (25 lbs. capacity), door makes table drawers for eggs, food, dish pan, etc.—everything in place and 2 gal. drinking water (ice cooled) tank with faucet
1 canvas folding water pail
2 folding metal chairs
1 demountable spade
1 ax (small)
1 tow rope or cable
1 flashlight
1 inner tube repair kit
2 blowout patches
1 luggage carrier
6 coach candles
1 first aid kit
1 sewing kit
1 set mud hooks
1 kerosene lantern
1 electric trouble light
1 emergency gasoline can
1 " lub. oil "
1 " water "
(the above can be purchased in set of 3 with attachments for running board, around $4)

The tent—a 7′ by 9′—can accommodate the adults, and the two children can sleep in a car bed in the car. For all four persons carry rubbers, rain coats, woolen sweaters, change of clothing. The air beds and sleeping bags weigh less and take up less room than clumsy heavy, cot beds and give more comfort. The car bed, rolls up when not in use into a bundle some 48 inches wide and 5 inches diameter and goes anywhere. To the above can be added, of course, any spare blankets or comforters you may have at home. The above covers every article of necessity and comfort.

Africa

IN THE Congo you may still find spots where no white man has ever been.

Request:—"Can you give me some information on Belgian Congo? 1. Is there a railroad from the Ketanga copper mines westward through Angola to Benguella (Lobito Bay)?

2. Is the boundary line between Congo and Angola (Portuguese West Africa) clearly defined or is it just vague?

3. On some maps between Angola and Congo there is a large slice of territory marked as 'Muata Yanvos' kingdom. Does it mean an independent native kingdom?

4. Is the country between Angolo and Congo pretty well known, or is there still some left unexplored?"
—CHARLES CADEK, Bass Lake, Minnesota

Reply, by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler:—In 1884, the International Congo Association became an independent sovereign state; after the Berlin Conference in 1885 it took the name État Independent du Congo, King Leopold II of Belgium assuming the Sovereignty, for whom I later spent some four years in the Congo to confirm or refute rumors regarding the treatment of negroes. On November 15, 1908 the king's control of the Congo came to an end, the Belgian State assuming the Administration while the country was re-named Congo Belgique or Belgian Congo, which name is still in use today.

The area of the Congo is 386,000 square miles with a boundary line of 5728 miles, of which only 25 miles are on the seaboard.

I am answering your questions in the order asked by you:

1. The Benguella Railway from Lobito Bay to Ketanga has a 3′6″ track and was to be completed in 1930. I have no further information on this subject.

2. No. Boundary lines, generally, unless they are indicated by rivers, lakes, mountain ranges, etc., are never clearly defined in the sense that a traveler would know on safari that, with his next step, he would leave one and land in another country. One may run across so-called "monuments or markers" (mostly erected at "corners", such as at Difimda on the tenth degree south on the Angola-Congo border) to facilitate, or base survey lines on.

3. There is but one independent native kingdom

or empire in Africa left: Abyssinia. All others are simply terms, found on certain maps and employed to indicate the location or territory of a tribe or a certain chief, a large village or native town. For instance the Hereros in former German S.W. Africa use the prefix: "*Oka*", "*Ovi*", or "*Otji*" instead of "*muata*", meaning "Here is" or "Here are" such and such a tribe or chief, capital, etc.

4. Along the Benguella Railway, the country is essentially agricultural (tropical, of course) and, no doubt, attractive and interesting to any one seeing it for the first time though, personally, I would not classify it as "pretty".

4. As regards unexplored country, there are still thousands of square miles where no white man has ever set foot, though, in a general way it is known what to expect when one treks in a given direction. It may surprise you to hear that there are some 35,000 to 40,000 square miles along the Nile bed into which no white man has ever penetrated and there are other parts in Africa where the same thing applies.

Marine

A CHANGE in recruiting requirements. The possibility of further openings soon.

Request:—"Will you please let me know when recruiting in the Marine Corps will start and what are the qualifications?"

—WARREN W. MCCUTCHEN, Los Angeles, California

Reply, by Capt. F. W. Hopkins:—In reply to your query regarding enlistments in the Marine Corps, I am in receipt of "Standards for Enlistment" effective February 1st, 1931, from the local office in the Rowen Building. At the present time, this area has a quota of 75 men to be filled, under the following headings:

Men for Band Duty Only: Ages 18 to 30. Height 65" to 74". (Parents consent required ages 18, 19 and 20.)

Specialists: Auto mechanics, Butchers, Carpenters, Cooks, Bakers, Electricians, Gardeners, Horseshoers, Masons, Painters, Plumbers and Truck drivers. Ages 21 to 30 years. Height 65 to 74 inches.

For Sea Duty: Ages 19 to 27. Height 69" to 74". (Consent of parents required of men 19 to 20 years of age.)

Reenlistments: Ex-Marines only and those who are members of Class III, Fleet Marine Corps Reserve. Ex-Marines who have not been separated from Service more than 90 days.

Must not be more than 27 years of age, and be over 69 inches tall. They will be accepted for immediate transfer to Sea School and prepared for duty with the fleet. If Ex-Marines have less than 5 years' service they will be accepted for immediate transfer to sea school for further detail to sea duty.

Ex-Marines not included in above classification but who have been separated from the Corps less than 90 days, may be accepted and choose first assignments to either Mare Island or San Diego and not transferred to either place for sea duty.

All men must be in sound health, sound body and good physical conformation, normal eyes and ears, sound teeth, at least four opposing molars, no skin disease or organic disease, with weight in proportion to height, and be either native born or fully naturalized citizens of the U.S. Must never have been convicted of a crime or discharged from any U.S. Service other than honorably, and for first enlistment must present evidence of good moral character. Minors must present evidence of true birth date as well as sworn consent of both parents or guardians. All enlistments are for four years with no understanding of any sooner discharge for convenience. *All enlistments must be in the line for general duty*, with the exception of enlistments for *band duty only*. Preference may be expressed for specialist work, aviation or other duty, but no promise made. Enlistments for sea duty does not mean that the entire four years *must* be at sea; it is only for 1st assignment.

It is possible that a little later greater latitude will be allowed in recruiting requirements.

Parka

IT'S A disgrace to our intelligence that the only practical winter garment for working men has not been introduced into the northern United States. Now is a good time to order a light drill parka as a pattern, or idea, for next winter.

Request:—"Working with the engineers building new roads last winter, I nearly lost several fingers and toes on account of the cold. I am wondering if you can give me the information that I wish. The winters here rarely get below 15 degrees below zero, but they are quite damp and one feels the cold more.

I have heard of the parka that men wear in the North country and I think they are just what I have been looking for. As I understand it, they are built like union-alls, only lined with fur. Some one else told me that they were like an overcoat and that they wore trousers with the boots attached. I would appreciate very much information on the subject as to price, where I would have to send for them, etc." —G. H. MILLHOLLIN, Le Mars, Iowa

Reply, by Mr. Theodore S. Solomons:—Your hunch about parkas is correct: they are the only practicable winter garment for WORKING, especially when in a climate the least bit windy. It's a disgrace that it hasn't been generally introduced in northern United States and Canada. A disgrace,

that is, to the intelligence of people who know and who could and should have introduced them.

The parka is made of drill, ticking, lined or unlined, of fur of any kind, or part one, part t'other. It is simply a blouse, about knee long or less, loose, with contracted sleeve wrists so the hands can just get through them, and edged there with fur. The glove, mitten or gauntlet mitt (preferably the latter) slips over the narrow wrist. The main idea of the parka is seen in the neck and hood. To show you exactly how this is, take an old fashioned shirt whose front buttons only extend from the neck say a foot down. Now imagine the collar cut off and a piece inserted, triangularly, to fill the space in the opening which would result if you cut the several buttons off and stretched the shirt with your head in getting into it. That would be a space say six inches wide at the top and nothing at the lower end. Well, then, sew it in and bring the neck band together by puckering this insert, only have a draw string around the neck instead of fastening it with a collar button or an ordinary button. Now make a hood whose lower opening sews to the neck band, which is amply big for the head and which has a face opening enough so that the hood can be thrown back, off the head altogether and rest on the back of the neck. You can have a string from either side the chin so as to pucker the face opening (which is also lined with fur, preferably wolverene, which doesn't permit frost or ice to form) as well as the neck, or the face strings will be enough.

Now another simple way to describe it is a garment enclosing the entire body from knees up, exclusive of the face (though it will draw around most of the face, too) the neck part of which is big enough to admit the head as the garment (hands in first) is drawn over the head, and which will also enable the head to be thrust through the front, face opening. That's the parka, and it is comfortable and warm, keeping air, snow, etc., completely out of the head, neck, etc., which are the places of discomfort, and enabling free movement for all kinds of work without exposure. Men often wear caps under the parka hood, the latter being thrown back on the neck except when needed for added warmth and to protect the sensitive ears and neck.

Trousers with boots attached are almost never seen in the North, though very long boots are common (fur mucklucks). Fur pants are too warm for any kind of work. Send to the Alaska Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce at Seattle, Wash., for the names of dealers there carrying parkas. Two or three dollars will buy a light drill parka for a pattern, or idea.

Our Experts— They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

IN the past thirty-six hours death had trifled with all of them, toyed with them, hummed to them, whispered invitingly in their ears; and now in the eery darkness of a *juju* worshipping hut that was shrouded in the eternal mangroves of the Niger Delta, death spoke to them with the dreary, funereal beat of drums . . .

SHADOW *of the* PYTHON

A Two-Part Story by the Author of "Calvert of Allobar"

ROBERT SIMPSON

And These Fine Stories

THUMBS DOWN, a story of the War spies, by ARED WHITE; THE PRINCE OF BARBARY, a story of an Irish buccaneer among the Moors, by H. BEDFORD-JONES; OF VANITY, a story of Old Italy, by F. R. BUCKLEY; A NOOSE OF PEARLS, a story of the South Seas, by CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE; CAPTIVE IN HAITI, memoirs of the noted soldier of fortune, GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES; HOT AIR, a story of the Royal Air Force, by NEGLEY FARSON; THE PAGODA OF GOLD, a mystery story of Burma, by S. B. H. HURST; and the conclusion of DEATH IN TIGER VALLEY, a novel of the Siamese jungle, by REGINALD CAMPBELL.

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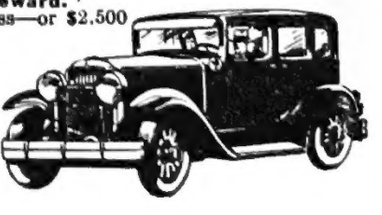

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